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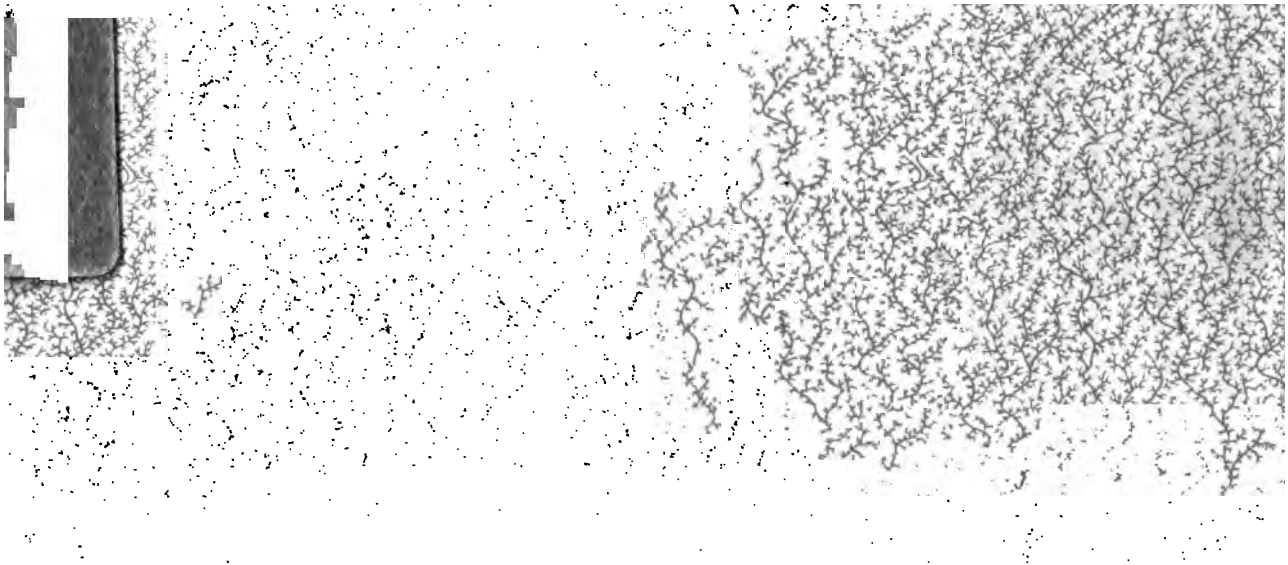

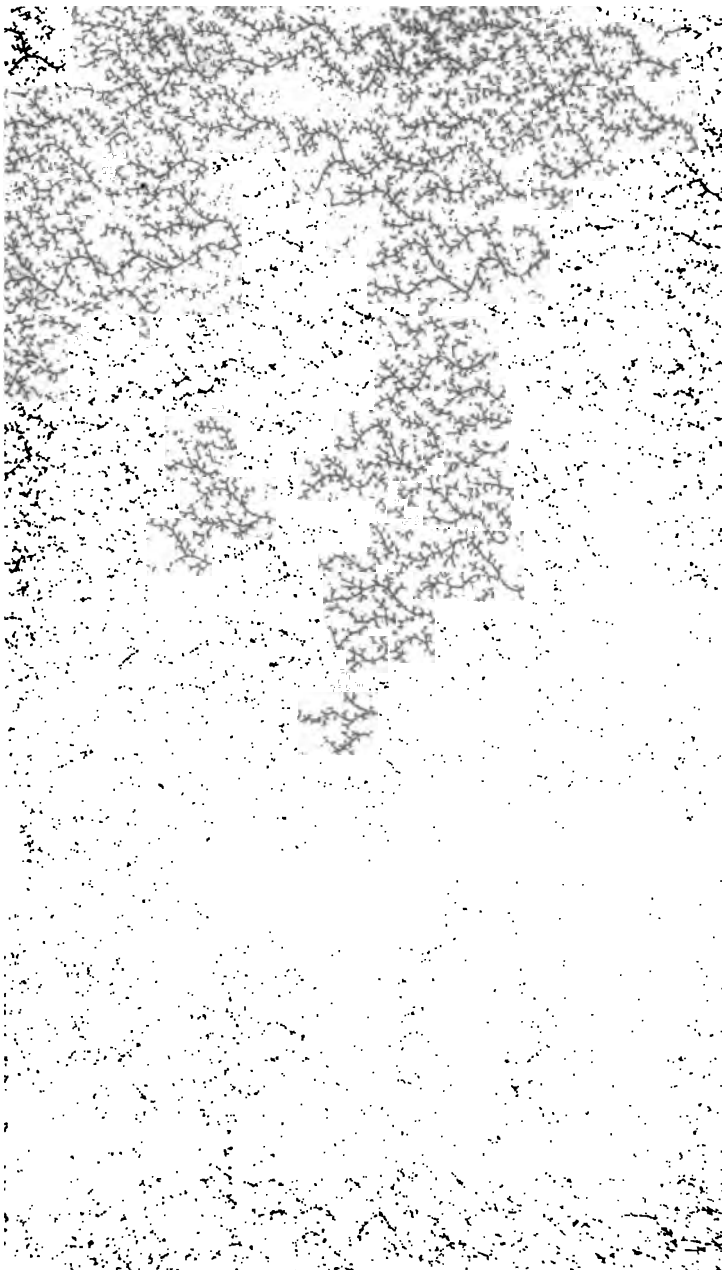

MUSTANG GRAY;

A ROMANCE.

BY

THE HON. JEREMIAH CLEMENS,

AUTHOR OF

"BERNARD LILE."

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Dedication.

TO

NICHOLAS DAVIS, ESQ.,

HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA.

My Dear Nick:—

In the Army, and in civil life—as an officer under my command in time of war,—and as an unwavering friend through all the less manly and more bitter struggles of parties and of politics in time of peace, you have acquired many claims to my regard. But it is not these alone that move me to write your name on the first page of this volume. The last words your Mother was ever heard to speak, were words of warm regard for me; and to the hour of his death, your Father honored me with a friendship which is among my proudest recollections. In the whole range of my acquaintance, I have never known two persons more remarkable for unswerving integrity of thought and action, or more distinguished for a lofty scorn of all that was low or vile in humanity. In dedicating this book to one of their descendants, I discharge a duty to the dead; at the same time, I mark my appreciation of the many virtues and manly qualities of the living.

Jere. Clemens.

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PREFACE.

In selecting for the Hero of my story a real character, whose name and exploits are so well known in the South-West, I was not unaware of the difficulties that surrounded the undertaking. I knew that *fiction* must in a great measure give place to *fact*, and that imagination would be inconveniently restricted in its flight. In such a work, the interest to be derived from a sustained and complicated plot is almost entirely lost, and if I had written for money alone, or even for reputation, my choice would have been different. But as the last of these did not weigh with me unduly, and the first not at all, I selected a Hero, whose actual history seemed to me best calculated to enforce the lesson it was my object to inculcate.

The leading object of "Bernard Lile," was to show that no strength of will, no genius, no gifts of fortune, and no accomplishments, are sufficient of themselves to save us from the greatest errors in our journey through the world.

In "Mustang Gray," this idea is carried still farther, and I have endeavored to show that no associations, no natural gentleness of disposition, and no pious training in early life,

will suffice to prevent us from yielding to the temptations of passion.

The moral of both is, that at all times, and under all circumstances, we are weak and helpless against the evil tendency of our own inclinations, if unaided by the protecting presence of a merciful God.

In both, I have sought to impress on the mind of the reader, the *one* great truth, that the only way to escape from Hell, is to keep our eyes forever fixed on Heaven.

I have made no attempt to paint one of those immaculate characters without which, a Novel is generally considered a failure by the sentimental reader. I have written of men and women as I know them to be — a mixture of good and evil, the best of whom are liable to err.

I have tried also to avoid that popular theory of Novelists, false as it is popular, that virtue is always rewarded, and vice is always punished here below. Some virtues and some vices carry their own rewards or punishments along with them; but in the experience of life, we do not find the lightning descending especially upon the dwellings of the wicked, nor do we hear of Angels dispatched with bags of gold to reward every good deed a mortal may perform. The ravens fed Elijah, but many a good man has starved in the streets of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and New Orleans, and found no raven to succor him.

The theory is not only false, it is full of danger to the young. It weakens exertion, destroys self-watchfulness, and, worst of all, saps the foundations of the Christian's creed, by teaching us to look for judgments here, instead of hereafter.

For the characters in this book, I am not responsible. They are real — many of them without even the flimsy disguise of a false name. They lived and acted at the times and in the places described. The principal personage was a man whom I knew long and well. With all his faults, he was one

"Who loved me, and whom I loved long ago."

There are hundreds now living, who will attest that the portrait I have drawn is true to the original. His adventures might have been swelled to a volume of treble the present size, and yet much have been left untold. I have confined myself to such only as I considered necessary to the development of his character.

The geographical and historical parts of the work, are as accurate as memory, after the lapse of busy years, would allow me to make them. Of its other features I have nothing to say. If the book altogether pleases the critics, very well — if it does not, still it is very well. I have long since learned to bear both praise and censure, even from the virtuous and enlightened, with as much indifference as is consistent with a just pride of character. When either comes from other sources, it is seldom read, and never remembered.

THE AUTHOR.

MUSTANG GRAY.

CHAPTER I.

"He stood beside a cottage lone,
And listened to a lute,
One summer eve when the breeze was gone,
And the nightingale was mute.
The moon was watching on the hill—
The stream was stayed, the maples still,
To hear a lover's suit:
That half a vow and half a prayer,
Spoke less of hope than of despair."

In the dense pine forests which skirt Cape Fear river in North Carolina, there lived in the year 18—, a widow and her only son. There still lingered about the form of the widow many traces of the touching loveliness of her earlier years. The frosts of sorrow had blighted the blossom, but the stem was yet green and flourishing with a warm life no sin had prematurely blasted. Her husband had been killed in the battles of his country, and left her poor, indeed, but still with enough to keep absolute want from her dwelling. From that hour she devoted herself with a tender and never-ceasing care to the training and education of her son, the only pledge of her brief and happy union with the man around whom all the rich wealth of her affections had clustered. That boy was the world to her, and never was there a young prattler who seemed better calculated to call forth all the deep stores of a mother's love. His fair locks fell in rich clusters about a head which a painter might have taken as his model for an angel. The de-

licately pencilled brows, and the long drooping lashes that shaded his pale blue eyes, reminded you of one of those gentle and tender girls, to whose very existence love is an unconquerable necessity. And in good truth he did love all things animate, and inanimate, which did not rudely check the overflowing fondness of his nature. He would sit for hours by his mother's knee, gazing up with his dove-like eyes into her face as she read to him passages from Holy Writ, or stories suited to his tender years. This intercourse between the mother and the child, pure and holy as it was, had yet its sorrowful forebodings. Sometimes she would lay down the book when she had finished reading, and twine her fingers in his silken hair, while her heart beat low and mournfully, as the fear crossed her mind, that a plant so tender and sensitive would wither and die even before the spring of life had passed away. But Mrs. Gray's fears were the fears of a mother: any one not blinded by her excessive fondness — not taught to shudder and grow fearful by past misfortune, would have seen that on this account, at least, her apprehensions were groundless. Beautiful as was Mabry Gray, tender and delicate as he seemed, a close observer would have detected in the long and muscular thigh, the broad chest, and the arm which even then was sinewy and knotted, the germs of a physical strength which would be tremendous in its full development.

Such was Mabry Gray at the age of ten. What he might be when the world had driven its harrow over his bosom, tearing up a sweet plant here, and a lovely flower there — laying bare the roots of all that was green and beautiful to the parching sun, and leaving his heart as dry and dusty as the trodden ways — what he might be then his mother never asked, and God in his mercy called her away before the horrid history was written. As yet all was peace, and innocence, and gladness within the bosom of the beautiful boy. The sweet waters of his life had never been rippled by a rude wind, nor stained

by commingling with the turbid current of a tempest-swollen stream.

Years flew by, and under his mother's gentle training, Mabry Gray was still all that her utmost fondness could desire. He had grown tall, indeed, and active, and strong as the young lion of the desert; but the almost spiritual beauty of the child remained. Of all the fierce and deadly passions, slumbering within that goodly shrine, not one had yet been roused to action — not one had cast a shadow upon its outward surface. No contact with his kind had called them into play. He had no companions, for in that wild region there were few settlers, and those were not of a character to attract the dreamy and intellectual boy. Alone he roamed the forest with his gun, and alone he sported for hours in the dark waters of the Cape Fear. Returning he would throw himself at his mother's feet, and read to her from the little library she had collected, tales of the old revolution, and of the wild life Marion and Sumpter had led in the deep swamps and dark woods, where liberty had taken refuge from the myrmidons of a king. Imperceptibly the love of adventure was growing up within him; but he knew it not, and, as no field was then open to attract him, he dreamed not of a coming day, when its wild yearnings would lead him through scenes and among companions that now would have frozen his life's blood at the fountain, if all the dark reality had been revealed.

Mabry Gray had attained his sixteenth year, when a new family came to settle in the neighborhood. The father was apparently a cold stern man, whose whole time and thoughts were assiduously devoted to the cultivation of his little farm, and who rarely exhibited even in the bosom of his own family any sign of human emotion. But beneath that cold exterior, there was a kindliness of heart, and a benevolence of feeling, well suited to the Christian character he so steadfastly professed. His wife had been somewhat wilful in her youth,

but even then she loved and respected her husband too much not to make his will the law of her conduct, though sometimes affecting to treat it lightly, and to laugh in his face at the solemn tone in which it was announced. Time, however, had subdued the wildness of her spirits, and the gay girl was transformed into the sober matron. Year by year the sterling worth and upright integrity of Mr. Allison's character had grown upon her — satisfied too from long experience of the depth and fervor of his love for herself and her children, her life had been a cloudless one, and a happy family was growing up around her. Of that family two only are necessary to be described, as two only are destined to make any figure in this history. The first was a youth of eighteen years of age; full of animal life and animal spirits; noisy and boisterous; across whose mental horizon no day-dream had ever flitted — who took the world as he found it, without inquiring whether it might be better or whether it might be worse — loved or hated as the fancy struck him, and never paused to reason upon the qualities of either friend or foe. Driving sorrow from him with something of his father's determined will, he seemed like one to whom this world must needs be a pleasant abiding-place. Of all persons, he would have been supposed least likely to become attached to Mabry Gray, or to win his affection in return. Yet almost from their first meeting, a friendship sprung up between them, which lasted without change or abatement until death came to sever its links.

Mabry Gray roamed the forest, and swam the river as usual, but he was no longer alone. John Allison had become his inseparable companion. From that association both profited, but Gray the most. He heard for the first time of the world without, from one who, to a limited extent, had actually mingled in its scenes. He learned to appreciate his own powers by comparison, and the gloom his solitary existence had

imparted to his character melted away before the ringing, joyous laugh of his light-hearted associate. He was then in the full flush of youthful health and strength — his heart unspotted by a single vice — worshipping with all a poet's wild enthusiasm the beautiful and the good — gathering knowledge, day by day, of that good kind which teaches us to do unto others as we would they should do unto us, and ardently longing for the time to arrive when, by beginning a career of usefulness to others, he hoped to secure a future of contentment and happiness for himself. In all things his morning was one of glorious promise. Ah! who could tell what clouds and storms the noon would bring?

He was a bitter sneerer, but a philosopher nevertheless, who said, "that virtue is best which is least tempted." There are thousands who look down with scorn upon a criminal at the bar of justice whose natures are more base than that of the felon they despise. True they have never committed theft, for they have never felt the pressure of want — they have never looked down into the tearful eyes of a wife as they returned to the pallet of a sick child moaning with hunger. They have never dyed their hands in human blood, for no foul wrong has waked the demon in their bosoms. No seducer's breath has blasted the roses of a sister's cheek. No serpent has crawled into the Eden of their homes and turned its sweets to poison. Troops of friends are ready to share every petty sorrow, and officious hands to supply every petty want. Surrounded by luxuries and blessed with wealth, they could not fall unless it were from the mere wantonness of wickedness. With no temptation to beset, no grief to harrow, no want to distract, no wrong to madden, it is easy enough to preserve a virtue no enemy has assailed. The weakest fortress is secure while it is unmolested, but the strongest that art ever built must yield at length if skilfully and vigorously attacked. It would be well to place ourselves in the situation

of the guilty one — to realize all he has resisted, endured, and suffered, before we venture to judge him too harshly, or to thank God that we are not as he is. The eye of the Tempter was upon Mabry Gray, and he was already preparing a fearful ordeal for that young and guileless heart. Returning from one of his accustomed excursions he found his mother in bed with a raging fever. For days he sat by her side and held the cooling draught to her burning lips. With his own hand he bathed her throbbing temples, and with his own hand administered all the prescriptions of her physician. At every sign of pain, at every low moan, he shuddered through every fibre of his sturdy frame; and then he would lean forward to press a kiss upon her flushed cheek while the large tears gathered in his eyes, and his voice quivered as he asked "Mother, oh! mother, can I do anything for you now?" A faint "No, my son," was the usual response; and then she would turn over and try to hide her sufferings from his watchful gaze. One day she awakened from a slumber that had been more profound than usual. The fever had in some degree abated, and the hectic spot upon her cheek was almost gone.

"I have been dreaming of your father, Mabry," she said. "I saw him as he was when we stood at the marriage altar together; and then I saw him as he was when they brought his glorious body home to me in its bloody shroud. From the battle-field his spirit ascended to Heaven, and he bade me, just now, come and join him there. You are very like him, my Son, and you must not forget him when I am gone. Live as he lived, and we shall all meet hereafter in a blessed eternity."

The young man spoke not, but knelt by the bed-side, and buried his face in the counterpane. For an hour he did not stir. When he did look up, something struck him as peculiar in his mother's features. He laid his hand upon her forehead,

but snatched it away as quickly as if a viper had stung him. The soul of Marian Gray had fled, and the form which was resting on that low couch is nought but dust and ashes now.

Mrs. Allison had been a constant attendant upon the sick bed of her neighbor, and now when all was over her husband with prompt benevolence took his way to the house of mourning. Laying his hand upon the shoulder of Mabry Gray, he said, earnestly and kindly,

"This is a heavy blow for you, my boy, and you must be too deeply grieved to attend to all that devolves upon you. Leave it to me."

The duty he had thus voluntarily assumed was kindly and properly discharged. When the last sad rite had been performed and the body of Marian Gray was deposited in its final resting-place, he once more approached the subdued and weeping youth.

"John tells me," he said, "that he will remain with you to-night. To-morrow you must lock up all that you consider of value, and surrender your house for a time to the keeping of the servants. Beneath my roof you will find a more cheerful home than your own. After a week or two, it will be time enough to begin to consider what is best for your interests under existing circumstances. My advice I need hardly say will then be freely and cheerfully given."

Mabry thanked him warmly and sincerely for all the kindness he had manifested, and assured him he would take no important steps without consulting freely with so generous a friend.

"But," he added "my life has been a lonely one, and solitude has no terrors for me. Besides, I should bring gloom and probably disquiet to your cheerful household. If you will let John remain with me a few days, I shall be deeply thankful. Beyond that, I need no companionship.

"Assuredly," answered the old man with a sort of grim

smile, "I can spare John well enough from our family circle, for the children would then have a little respite from his teasings. But I can not—ought not to excuse you. You will be better with us, and come you must."

And so it was settled; and the next day Mabry Gray became an inmate of the hospitable mansion of William Allison.

It is fearful to look upon a young heart when it is first stricken with sorrow. Not the heart of a child, but the heart of one whose intellect is almost matured — whose faculties are almost developed. Of one who has passed the period when grief comes like an April shower through which the sunbeams burst even before the pearly drops have ceased to fall. Of one who, standing on the verge of manhood, or of womanhood, tries to look forward and finds a dark curtain interposed before the vision on whose gloomy surface is painted nothing but the shadows of joys that are gone. Fortunately there are but few who are required to bear up under the stunning, crushing force of such a blow. Providence, in its mercy, has so ordered it that affliction generally begins with feeble assaults. A little grief to-day, a vexing disappointment to-morrow, a petty suffering the next day, and so on until the bolt that would have blasted us at first, now hardens while it scathes. To Mabry Gray no such merciful preparation had been accorded. His father had died when he was too young to feel the loss, and since then under the watchful guardianship of his mother no care, no pang had ever visited his bosom. His mother's death fell upon him like a clap of thunder from a cloudless sky, sudden, terrible, deadly in its awful might. His was not merely the affectionate regard of a child for a fond and indulgent parent, but a love inseparably connected with all he had ever known of good — with all he had ever dreamed of innocence and peace. Never for one moment had the possibility of their separation crossed his mind. He had laid for hours at her feet and listened to the low music of her voice with the

rapturous joy of an idolater, who fancies that his God is smiling on him. And now when that voice was hushed and still — when that form was in the cold, cold ground, a thick darkness fell upon his soul, which tombed in its sepulchral vault the hopes and joys, and it might be, many of the virtues then just springing into existence.

Not two weeks, but many, did he remain under the roof of his kindly neighbor. He made daily pilgrimages to his mother's grave, though he never spoke of his bereavement even to John Allison, who was his constant companion. After awhile his intercourse with the family became more free and cheerful, and the old people rejoiced in the belief that the thick gloom in which he had been enveloped was gradually wearing away. Another star was rising above his horizon: different from the one he had worshipped so intensely for years, but gentle and sweet, and full of happy and soothing promises. Mr. Allison had a daughter about the age of Mabry Gray. While his mother lived, he shrunk from her with the timidity of a bashful boy who had been all his life unaccustomed to female society, and the bright-eyed, happy girl, increased his shyness by laughing heartily, more than once, at some little awkwardness she detected in his manner. When he came to reside beneath her father's roof, and she saw how real, and deep, was the suffering he endured — how carefully he gathered the flowers from her garden to plant about his mother's grave — how he writhed and quivered at the slightest incautious allusion to that loved name, her whole manner changed at once. She would meet him on his return from an occasional absence with that affectionate welcome none but a woman knows how to extend. She would make him sit by her side and read to her mother and herself, while their own fingers were busied with the garments of the children. She watched his dark hours, and would break in upon his reveries with some sweet song which drove the cloud from his brow,

and turned his thoughts to brighter themes; and once when she found him, and her brother, in the garden gathering flowers, she walked up to him, and said,

"You must let me help you, Mr. Gray. I understand these plants better than you do, and brother John never understood anything but how to tease the soul out of every one he meets."

From the garden she walked with him to his mother's grave, and with her own hands planted upon it the shrubs and flowers they had collected. Oh! why is it that from our best purposes the deadliest venom is often distilled? Julia Allison no more thought of Mabry Gray *as a lover*, than she thought of the man in the moon. He had her sympathies, nothing more. In the first place she was several months his senior, and what girl of her age ever thought of waiting for years until her lover should grow into manhood? In the next place, with all her mother's kindness of heart and manner, she had inherited her father's clear judgment and indomitable will. If she had reasoned at all upon the subject, she would have said, "Mabry Gray would not suit me as a lover, or as a husband. His nature is too exacting — his passions too wild and fearful for domestic peace. He would be jealous of the sunbeam that kissed my cheek, of the flower I placed in my bosom, of the winds that played among my tresses. We should be miserable as lovers — still more wretched as a married pair." And if after this reasoning she found that love had grown up in her bosom, she would have crushed it out as mercilessly as if it were an adder's egg. While such were the feeling's of the young girl, widely different passions and desires were rioting in the bosom of the boy. Day by day he sought her society with increased avidity. Day by day he hung upon her words with a new rapture. At every tone of her voice, his wild heart thrilled and trembled with more than the aspen's quivering restlessness. At every touch of her hand his frame shivered,

and his cheek changed rapidly from the hue of the rose tc the lily's whiteness.

"He had no breath, no being but in her's;
She was his voice; he did not speak to her,
But trembled on her words. * * *
* * * * He had ceased
To live within himself; she was his life,
The ocean to the river of his thoughts,
Which terminated all.

Julia Allison would not have been a woman, if she had failed to note the growth of his deep and absorbing passion. She would willingly have nipped it in the bud; but here she encountered a serious difficulty: he had never spoken to her of love, and it was not quite consistent with maiden delicacy to assume its existence before it was declared. She was compelled to content herself with withdrawing as much as possible from his society, and avoiding, as far as she could, all occasions for being alone in his company. This state of things had lasted for some time, when one evening as she was examining the flowers in her little garden she felt a light touch on the arm, and a husky voice murmured,

"Will you favor me with a short walk, Miss Julia?"

Hesitating, trembling, shuddering at the scene through which her heart told her she must pass, yet feeling that it could not long be delayed, and ought not to be avoided, both on his account and her own, she replied in scarcely articulate tones,

"Certainly; if you have anything to say to me."

"I have much to say, and it has already been too long delayed."

Without another word he placed her arm within his own, and turned slowly towards the river. They reached its brink at a spot where the wild grass grew in rich luxuriance up to the water's edge. A thick cluster of little trees and bushes

effectually hid them from any prying eyes in the direction of the land; and here within the shadows of this natural bower he paused, released her arm, and addressed her with trembling earnestness.

"Julia Allison, I did not bring you here to tell you that I loved you; for that is a knowledge no words of mine are needed to impart. Nor did I propose to sue for yours in return; for well I know what answer would now be given. I have sought this opportunity to tell you that in a few days I am going out into the world, with a view of endeavoring to fit myself for its trials and its struggles. Give me one sweet hope to cherish while I am gone. Tell me that, after the lapse of a few years, if I come back to you with a character unspotted, with a heart unchanged, and with a judgmeut improved and disciplined by experience — tell me that then you will listen to me — that then you will allow me to kneel at your feet, and plead that cause upon the success of which all the joys of my existence depend."

He ceased — there were tears in her eyes when she looked up, but there was no wavering in her manner.

"Forgive me, Mabry, if I give you pain. Our hearts are not in our own keeping. I shall love you as a sister always. More than a brother you can never be to me. Go out into the world as you propose, where you will meet with lovelier forms and brighter eyes than mine. In a little while you will forget this boyish fancy, if you do not forget my existence altogether."

"Forget you! I may forget the mother who gave me birth. I may forget the sun in heaven, or the God who made me; but when all else is a dreary blank, your image will still be before me, with not a hue of its loveliness faded — not an atom of its sweetness departed. It is seared in here upon the brain, and here upon the heart, vivid, distinct, unaltered, and unalterable."

"Oh! do not speak thus, Mabry. Spare me the misery of

believing that innocently and unconsciously I have cast so dark a shadow over the morning of your life."

"Then bid me to hope: or rather, for I will ask nothing that implies a promise, say that you know not what the future may bring forth — that a time may come hereafter when you will regard me with warmer feelings than now."

"I can not. Indeed I can not. It would be a deep shame to me, and a vile wrong to you, to encourage hopes my heart tells me can never be realized. Let us part now, and when you have learned to regard me only as a sister I shall gladly welcome you back to your native home."

"Regard you as a sister! Listen, Julia, and judge if the feelings burning within me can ever be sobered down to anything so tame as a brother's love. At this very moment I could fold you to my bosom, and leap into yon dark flood with rapture. To die with your arms clasped around me would be unspeakable bliss, compared with the dark torture of living without you."

There was a terrible earnestness in the air and manner of him who uttered these wild words, which made the young girl shrink from him like a startled fawn. He saw her terror, and quickly added,

"Fear not. I could indeed do all I have said, and more, it may be, besides; but without your free consent I would not rudely handle a lock of those raven tresses to save my own soul from perdition."

"Let us go," was the response. "It is time this painful interview was brought to a close."

"Be it as you say. At least I know that you do not love another, and while that knowledge abides with me I shall struggle on, if not with hope, at least without absolute despair. And now," he continued, "good bye. It is but a few steps to your father's gate, and you need no escort there. For me,

I go not again beneath his roof until happier times, and brighter hopes enable me to meet his kindness as it merits."

He took her unresisting hand in his, and raised it to his burning lips. One fiery moment he held it there — dropped it with a shudder, and wended his way through the dark pine forest to his solitary home. The next day John Allison called at the house of Mabry Gray. He was gone. The old servant however handed him a brief note, in which the writer announced that he was going to Raleigh, and expected to remain there for a considerable period; adding that he would keep his friend advised of whatever success attended him. In a little while he wrote that he had been fortunate enough to secure a situation in the business house of an old friend of his mother, and had commenced the career of life under circumstances as favorable as he could wish.

Months and years rolled on. Mabry Gray's correspondence with John Allison had been regular and constant. They had not met, but each held in sacred remembrance the friendship of their early days; and John was gratified to learn that his old companion was gradually but surely rising to affluence. From other sources Mr. Allison heard that young Gray had won a high reputation for unbending integrity as well as for unflinching devotion to business. While things were progressing thus prosperously for our hero to all human apprehension, the tempter was again at work. Between the two young men the name of Julia had never been mentioned since the day they parted on the banks of the Cape Fear. The feelings of his friend were, however, well known to her brother, and he omitted no opportunity to advance his suit. The result of these efforts had heretofore proved entirely unsatisfactory. To all his arguments, there was but one answer:

"I do not love Mabry Gray, brother John, and I will not give my hand where my heart has not gone before it."

Still that brother waited, watched, and hoped. He had

strong faith in the virtue of perseverance; and the favorable reports they were constantly receiving of Gray, he thought, must in time produce happy results. All these anticipations were blasted by the arrival of a stranger, whom business first brought to his father's house. Robert Taliafero (for such was his name) had passed the meridian of life. In appearance he was much more youthful, and his manners were unmistakably those of a man who had mingled familiarly with the most polished society. He had long been engaged speculating in the rosin and turpentine for which North Carolina is famous, and in the course of his adventurous business had made many voyages to distant lands. His naturally strong intellect had been well cultivated in his youth, and subsequent travel had added to the rich stores he had gathered from books. In conversation there was, when he chose, a strange light in his eye, which charmed and fascinated like the rattlesnake, and like the rattlesnake, too, was deadly to all things that fluttered about him. His business with Mr. Allison had long been concluded, yet he did not go. John easily divined the spell that detained him. He had watched with jealous vigilance his growing intimacy with his sister, and now without hesitation he sat down and wrote to his friend —

"Come back to us at once, if you would not lose Julia forever."

Mabry Gray broke the seal and glanced at the contents. His heart stood still. A deadly pallor spread over his features, and he reeled as if a strong arm had swayed a bolt of iron against his head. In another moment that heart was throbbing as if it would burst its prison bounds, and his eye was glowing with a fire before which the Numidian lion might have quailed. Thrusting the letter in his bosom, he wrote hurriedly —

"In three days this will reach you — on the fourth I shall be at home — Meet me there."

Promptly and decisively the necessary steps were taken. His outward manner had grown calm as usual — the tempest was within. There all the fiends of hell had gathered, and his guardian Angel fled upward to Heaven to report that a soul was lost forever.

CHAPTER II.

"Fierce as the gloomy vultures now
To thee, old man, my deeds appear;
I read abhorrence on thy brow,
And this too was I born to bear!
'Tis true, that, like that bird of prey,
With havoc have I marked my way!
But this was taught me by the dove,
To die — and know no second love."

It was an October day, cool, bright, and cloudless. The sun had still several hours to travel, when Mabry Gray rode up to the little enclosure around his maternal dwelling. He was greeted by "old Hector," and "aunt Nanny," the two servants in whose charge the premises had been left, with all the extravagant demonstrations of joy that family servants in the South never fail to manifest upon the return, after a long absence, of the young master, or the young mistress, they have dandled upon their knees. A cheerful fire was burning on the hearth-stone, and his little room was fully prepared for his reception.

"How did you know I was coming?" he asked of the old woman, when Hector led his horse to the stable.

"Massa John been here, and told us. He say he comin back hisself before sundown."

Entering the house and throwing himself in a chair before the fire, he buried his face in his hands, and thought deeply. It was scarcely more than a half hour before John Allison

came in, but in that half hour he had passed through ages of suffering.

"That pause that pondered o'er his fate,
Oh! who its dreary length shall date?
Though in time's record nearly naught,
It was eternity to thought."

When John Allison entered, he grasped his hand with a warm, firm pressure, and leading him to a seat, said, in a hoarse whisper,

"Sit down, John, and tell me all at once, for as yet I only know that some dark shadow is gathering, and that some heavy blow is about to fall upon all my hopes of earthly happiness."

"I am afraid it has already fallen," was the reply: "but listen, and judge for yourself."

He then related the arrival of Mr. Taliafero in the neighborhood, and his continued presence there, although his business had long since been concluded, and added,

"He now says that he is waiting for letters he ordered to be forwarded here, and which will determine his future movements. Almost every day he is with Julia, riding, or walking, and frequently he passes the night beneath my father's roof. The worst of it is, that I believe the foolish girl is blindly and madly in love with this stranger, of whom she knows nothing absolutely, and who may be a reckless adventurer, a swindler, or something worse."

Gray had listened to this story without interruption. When it was ended, he said, thoughtfully,

"Robert Taliafero: I think I have heard that name before. I think I have heard my employer and benefactor speak of him as a shrewd, bad man. I paid but little attention to it at the time, for I dreamed not it could ever be a matter of interest to me. I will write to Mr. Brantly, and learn if my suspicions be correct."

"You will stay with me to-night, John," he continued,

"and by to-morrow we will try and mature some plan of operations."

"Yes, but I must first go home to let the old people know you have returned, and that I intend to spend the night with you; otherwise they might feel uneasy at my absence. Shall I tell Julia that you are here?"

"I suppose you had better do so. She will know it to-morrow at any rate, and may as well be prepared for the meeting which must take place."

As soon as John Allison was gone, Gray walked to the rack where his rifle was suspended, and taking it down, examined it with careful attention. From long disuse, some rust and dirt had gathered about the lock and muzzle, but he found it in better condition than he expected, and soon succeeded in restoring it to perfect order.

"Now let me see," he muttered as he passed through the door, "if I have forgotten the use of this good weapon."

Selecting a white spot upon a pine tree, about eighty yards distant, for his mark, he raised the rifle to his shoulder and fired. Upon walking up to it, he found the ball had struck within an inch of the mark.

"This will not do," was his inward ejaculation: "I must practise awhile."

Selecting a new and a better mark, he fired again and again, each time with increasing gratification. The last shot broke the centre, and he turned towards the house with an air of satisfaction. At this time, the sound of horses' feet attracted his attention, and looking up the road, he saw a horseman advancing at a rapid pace. The road was a public one, and much used by travellers, as well as the neighbors; but something in the heart of Mabry Gray told him that this was his deadly enemy. He asked not why. He paused not to reason upon the conviction. He *felt* that between that man and himself, a grave was yawning, and that one or the other would soon tenant its narrow chamber. He stopped, and turning his

full face to the road, awaited the horseman's approach. Without slackening his pace the stranger rode by, touching his hat, however, with a courteous "good evening," as he passed. No sign of recognition — no acknowledgment of the courtesy, followed. Clasping his rifle as if he wished to crush the iron tube within his grasp, the eye of Mabry Gray was fixed upon his rival, with an intensity which took in every lineament of his features — every outline of his form, and stamped them upon his memory forever. Even after the horseman had passed beyond the reach of his vision, he continued to gaze in the direction he had taken, and it was not until the shades of night began to gather about him, that he sought once more the shelter of his house. When John Allison came in soon afterwards, he found Gray seated by the fire, his elbow resting on a table, aud his burning forehead clasped in his sinewy hand.

"I have seen him, John," was his first salutation. "He passed within twenty feet of me. I had my rifle in my hand, and it was a sore struggle to keep from sending a bullet through his brain."

"It was, indeed, Mr. Taliafero. How did you know him?"

"Know him! I would have known his ghost, if I had met it on the confines of hell. Love has its instincts, which are often more reliable than the weak thing we call reason; but there is no instinct like that of hate. It never errs, and never misleads. My blood was running like molten lava, before he had approached within fifty yards of me, and when he bade me 'good evening,' in a tone he meant to be courteous, it sounded to my ear like the viper's hiss; and viper he is, if there is anything in the human countenance to indicate a venomous reptile's nature."

"Why, Mabry, I think him very handsome."

"So is the serpent, but it is a serpent nevertheless. If I do not succeed in proving Mr. Robert Taliafero to be a scoun-

drel he is sacred from my touch. If I do succeed, I will crush out his loathsome life, if I have to hunt him to the altar's foot."

"I will stand by you, Mabry, to the last; still, for your own sake, you must act prudently, and upon full proof. My father and mother must not be unnecessarily grieved; and even Julia, wilful as she is, must have her feelings dealt with as tenderly as possible."

"Ah! there is the worst of it," replied Gray, with bitter emphasis. "In any event we will give pain to those we love most deeply. Curses upon the double-dyed villain, who has imposed the necessity upon us."

"But we do not know he is a villain yet, and he may turn out a true man after all."

"Not know it! I tell you again, John, that the instinct of hate never deceives us. Besides it is written by the hand of the Almighty upon his brow. I want no proof to satisfy me, but I must have proof to satisfy your father. My letter to Mr. Brantly will go to-morrow. He has many acquaintances in Wilmington, and is often there. We shall soon learn what Mr. Taliafero's character is, if he has been trading there as long as he says. In the meantime, we can do nothing but watch the current of events."

While the young men are waiting for a reply to Gray's letter, let us go back a week — one little week, to trace up the events that had transpired in the family of Mr. Allison. John was right in supposing that his sister was blindly in love, but he dreamed not how far that love had carried her. The very firmness of her character, when once she had yielded to the influence of the gentle God, instead of a protection, became her most dangerous enemy. Her's was not a nature to surrender her heart by halves. She gave up all at once. There was about her none of that shrinking timidity which is often a young girl's best protection. Fearing nothing — trusting

fully and entirely, she leaned her head upon her lover's bosom, or pressed her lips to his without a thought of danger.

One evening they had wandered forth as usual, and were standing on the very spot where she had parted with Mabry Gray. The sun was near its setting, and the declining rays, tinged with their golden hues the dark waters of the river. He pointed it out to her, and said, in that low, sweet tone that always goes to the heart,

"See, my own love, this stream has wandered on for many a mile through the dark forests that skirt its brink, with the shadow and the cloud above it, yet now when it is approaching its ocean goal, a golden light sheds a beauty and a glory on the little way it has still to flow. Even so has it been with me. The morning of my life has passed amid the cares and sorrows of a loveless existence — now when the noon is gone, and my footsteps have turned downwards toward the grave, heaven in its mercy sends a glorious light, to hallow and to gladden the years that remain."

"And in that thought, Robert, there is a selfish rapture to me. Oh! you know not how wildly this heart throbs and trembles, when I say to myself, *he is mine, and mine only.* When I think that in all the past, among the many you have known, who were fairer and better than I am, no one has won the rich treasure of your love — that it was reserved for me all, unworthy as I am, to take captive that lofty intellect, and kindle the fires of passion in that manly breast. I should love you, deeply love you, even if you had knelt at twenty shrines in days gone by; but the knowledge that you offered no incense save to me, imparts a deeper and a holier fervor to the passion which informs and animates every fibre of my heart."

"You are right, sweet one; and I was wrong to wish for a moment that fewer summers had passed over me. The love of which poets sing, which buds and blooms in early life, is doubtless a sweet and beautiful flower, but it is not like the

passion that springs up in after years from a soil hitherto unbroken, twining its roots deep among beds of granite; rearing its lofty stem to heaven; defying the tempest's power, and shivering not even at the lightning's flash. It is such a passion you have waked in me, Julia; and though the time we are permitted to enjoy it may be brief, every moment of such a love is worth an age of youthful rapture."

His left arm encircled the waist of the lovely girl, and her head fondly rested against his bosom. Folding her still more closely to him, and pointing to the now setting sun, he continued:

"Not in the world which yonder orb is leaving, nor in that he is going to light, nor in the glowing heaven above us, is there a bliss so wild, and warm, and boundless as that which thrills me now."

He stooped as he spoke, and his warm lips sought hers. It was as light as the rose-leaf's touch, but it made the young girl shiver, and her head was pressed more closely to his bosom. Again that kiss was renewed, and this time it was returned. Once more their lips met, and clung with a long, long pressure, as if each wished them glued together forever.

* * * * * * * * *

Slowly they walked towards her father's house. Gently and tenderly he spoke to her by the way — the words were indistinct to her, but she knew it was *his* voice, and it seemed sweeter than an angel's flute. There was a strange tumult in her bosom, with no one feeling clear, distinct, and well defined. Joy, guilt, grief, and shame were struggling there. She had yielded all, and the fiery excitement had not yet died away sufficiently to enable her to judge of the immensity of the sacrifice. That night, when tossing on a sleepless pillow, she looked at it with a clearer vision. Oh! quickly on the heels of crime follow the dark penalties of sin. Hitherto fear had been a stranger to her bosom — now she trembled when she remem-

bered that Robert Taliafero had never spoken to her of marriage. He had poured into her ear many a tale of fervent, burning love. He had knelt at her feet again and again, and vowed with passionate earnestness that heaven itself would be rayless and joyless without her. Every moment's absence from her side he declared was torturing madness. Yet even when he had won the blushing avowal that his love was returned, he spoke not of obtaining the law's sanction, or the church's blessing. In the intoxication of his society, she had overlooked the omission. She felt so happy, she cared not to disturb the delirious dream. If any doubt had obtruded upon her mind, she would instantly have driven it away as a vile treason to her heart's allegiance. When it was too late, she began to ask herself why it was that the one word, so inseparably connected with a pure and holy love, had never passed his lips. It is the nature of crime to be fearful, and doubt and gloom were rapidly gathering where all was confidence and sunshine before. Still she saw not her fault in all its hideous blackness. The sin was too sweet to be hated at once. Mingled with her darker meditations were others of a different nature. She recalled with thrilling emotion every fond word he had uttered. She remembered with panting bliss the wild fire which ran through her veins when his hand rested upon her throbbing bosom. She placed her own upon its ivory surface, in the vain hope that it would recall some portion of the fiery joy that his had imparted; and when tired nature could bear no more, and she dropped off into a fevered and broken slumber, her visions partook of the stormy character of her waking thoughts. Now she was standing by the river's brink, with his arm fondly encircling her tapering waist, and his lips glued to hers. Then her father's stern and angry frown, and her mother's pale and tearful face, were before her. Then again she felt herself clasped in a warm embrace, and looking up she beheld the features of a grinning fiend. With

a shriek she started from her dreaming pillow, and found her limbs bathed in a cold clammy sweat, and her heart almost pulseless from the wildness of her terror. Oh! had those visions come but one short day before, what a world of suffering would have been spared to that gentle girl! Alas! our good angels sometimes sleep, while the evil one is ever near, leading us on over golden paths and through flowering meads until the irrevocable deed is committed, and then he leaves us, but he leaves a demon with a whip of scorpions to torture the wretch he has tempted and betrayed.

She trembled as she descended to the breakfast-table, the next morning. The coward consciousness of guilt made her fancy that her shame was written on her brow; and, when her father greeted her as usual, she wondered that no angry passion glowed upon his placid countenance. The calm voice and bearing of her lover, in some degree reassured her; and when, after breakfast, they walked into the garden, and he gathered a rose-bud, to place among her raven tresses — when he poured into her eager ears those burning words he knew so well how to employ, all apprehension vanished, and she was again confident, loving, happy. So for days flowed on the current of her life — nervous, doubting, fearing when alone — hopeful, trusting, contented by his side. At the first sound of his voice, every shadow vanished; and hanging on his words, she would have deemed it sacrilege to question the earnest truth of one whose honied accents seemed as if they were borrowed from above. Poor girl! she had yet to learn that the arch-fiend himself most often pleads in seraph tones.

A week had gone, when she was startled by the announcement that Mabry Gray had returned. She never loved him, but she had feared him always, and now far more than ever. From the intensity of her own passion, she had learned to appreciate all the madness of his. Almost unconsciously she had read the dark pages of his heart, and fathomed the deadly

passions festering there. She feared he might seek a quarrel with her lover, and shuddered still more deeply at the thought that those jealous eyes would be fixed upon her every movement, and that one incautious word, or one incautious look, might betray the foul blot upon her maiden purity.

The next day after his arrival, Gray called at the house of Mr. Allison. He was greeted kindly and cordially by the family, except Julia, who did not make her appearance. She was unwell, her mother said, and had not left her chamber during the day.

"It is well," he muttered as he walked homeward, "that we did not meet. I know nothing now, and it would be idle to talk to her of my suspicions. I will ride over to the post-town to-morrow, and see what I can learn there of Mr. Robert Taliafero."

At the village he made many minute inquiries, but he learned nothing, except that his enemy had made considerable purchases in the vicinity, and had promptly paid the price on delivery of the articles. He was regarded as a man of shrewd sense and business tact, who knew the value of what he purchased, and would pay no more. His conduct throughout had been fair and honorable, and, so far from any unfavorable suspicion attaching to him, he was evidently something of a favorite among the villagers. Mabry Gray returned home dissatisfied, and, to some extent, disappointed. His convictions were as strong as ever, although he had failed in obtaining the slightest proof to sustain them. He led his horse to the stable, rubbed him down, and fed him with his own hands; then patting him on the neck, he addressed him as if the noble animal was conscious of his meaning:

"We may soon have to travel far and hard, my good steed, and I must look to it that you are in proper condition for the journey."

Returning to the house, he took down his rifle, and walked

out into the forest to practise. Do you ask, reader, why all this careful preparation was making, when it was uncertain whether any wrong had been done, or any case would arise where Gray's interference could be justified? The answer is, that, to his mind, not a shadow of uncertainty existed. He was as sure that Robert Taliafero was a villain, as he was that the sun was riding in the heavens. Fierce as he was, he sought some excuse for taking away the life of a fellow-being beyond that of being fairly supplanted in the affections of the woman he loved. That excuse was supplied by a fixed and unalterable belief in the baseness of his rival — that somehow, or in some way, he had imposed upon the credulity of a trusting girl, and that the marriage-altar would be to her but the beginning of a life of wretchedness and tears. With this steady and firm conviction upon his mind, he absolutely gloated over the bloody retribution he contemplated. From day to day his practice with the rifle continued, until the time when the wished-for letter was expected to arrive. At the hour he was on the spot, received it with a nervous hand from the post-master, thrust it into his pocket, and galloped home to read it alone. In his own room, he tore it open and devoured its contents:

"My Dear Sir:

Your favor has been received and contents noted. You ask me if I know Robert Taliafero. I do know the man. I had dealings with him many years ago, and thought I had occasion to complain of him for unfairness. His character in Wilmington, where he has long traded, is not good. Without being absolutely a swindler, his honesty is very questionable. You must be mistaken however, about his attentions to the daughter of your old friend, since he is already married, and has a wife and children in Baltimore.

Very truly,

John Brantly."

Gray's countenance was lighted with a joy that had long been a stranger there, as he laid down the letter, and exclaimed,

"Now, Mr. Taliafero, I have you, and thank God, in such a way that I need shed no blood."

Old Hector was immediately dispatched for John Allison, to whom the letter was exhibited with exulting satisfaction. John read it with a dark frown upon his brow, and an angry spot upon his cheek.

"This will drive him from the neighborhood, sure enough, and by the living God, I'll quicken his motions with a cow-hide."

"No, John, no. That is a satisfaction of which you must not deprive me. He has caused more suffering to me than to you, and besides, it was I who brought his villany to light. I shall take good care of his hide, I promise you; but I wish first to expose him in your father's presence. The sickening disgust of that exhibition will, I trust, effectually cure Julia of her folly."

Long, and earnestly, the young men consulted upon the measures to be adopted. The advantages, and disadvantages, of half-a-dozen modes of proceeding were discussed, and nothing was absolutely determined on; when, near sun-set, John Allison rose to depart.

"I will go with you," said Gray, "part of the way. A walk in this bracing air will cool my blood, and do me good."

Not far from Mr. Allison's premises, Gray bade his friend good evening, and bent his steps in the direction of the river. The sun had gone down, and the night set in clear, cloudless, and beautiful.

"The moving moon went up the sky,
And nowhere did abide;
Softly she was going up,
And a star or two beside."

No breath of air stirred the long leaves of the towering pine. Not an insect chirped. Not a sound broke the stillness of the

quiet night. It was such a night as the early Christian loved, when he stole forth into the lonely fields, beyond the city's walls, and the tyrant's guards, to commune in secret with his God. On such a night, every bad and every stormy passion feels rebuked and awed, and the bold wretch who would laugh the thunder-peal to scorn, yields to the gentle influence of the holy time, and shudders as he contrasts the loveliness without, with the blackness within. On such a night the virgin took the lion by his shaggy mane, and the fierce brute forgot his bloody nature, and fondly rubbed his tawny head against his gentle captor. The hour and the scene possessed a peculiar solemnity for Mabry Gray. In his solitary boyhood, he had loved to lie upon the long grass, and gaze upward at the starry spheres, which spangled the blue vault above him. A little later when love made its home in his bosom, he selected a star, and naming it Julia, watched it night after night, until he fancied he could read in its glimmering light, all the sorrows, and the joys, impending over her he loved so well; and now he threw himself upon the ground, and watched as of yore for some sign his heart might interpret as an omen of the future. A cloud was gathering near it. He turned his gaze to other quarters of the heavens. Everywhere all was serenely clear and beautiful. Once more his eye sought that star — the cloud had shut it out from his vision. At the same time a light breeze sprung up, and swept with a hollow moan through the lofty pines. Such omens will have their influence upon the firmest heart, and Gray slowly rose to his feet, with a gloomy presage of coming woe and doom. The sound of low voices fell upon his ear, and not caring to be seen alone in the woods at such an hour, he seated himself at the root of a giant tree, and waited for the speakers to pass. As they approached nearer, he distinguished the voice of Julia Allison.

"Why, Robert," she said, "why not celebrate the ceremony before you go? Oh! you know not the dark tortures I have

suffered since that fatal day, or you would not hesitate to grant the boon I ask."

"A few days can make no difference to you, Julia," was the reply; "and in that time I shall come back to bear you to the sunny Isle where I am going. There, among its bowers of orange and of citron, you shall tell me how idle were your fears, and blush to own that you ever doubted or mistrusted me. Be assured no danger threatens us. The secret is our own, and it is safe. Trust me fully: you will never regret it."

"Have I not trusted you? I have surrendered all a woman has to give — and surely, surely I am not exorbitant in asking back only the innocence I have lost."

Gray heard no more. He was turned to stone. For many minutes he sat with his teeth clenched — his eyes fixed, and his nerves as rigid as a statue. At last, he sprang to his feet with a fierce oath, and rushed with rapid strides towards his own dwelling. Arrived there, he threw himself upon the bed, clasped both hands upon his forehead, and muttered, "Let me think." Soon, however, he was on his feet again, pacing the floor with uneven steps; while now and then a low, heart-broken ejaculation, found utterance — "Oh! God, I can't think." The old woman came in to arrange his supper. He bade her leave him; then, seizing the water-pitcher, drank deeply. Throwing himself once more upon the bed, he laid there for hours, motionless as the dead. It was after midnight when he arose, calm, collected, self-composed. The war of the passions was over. A stillness succeeded, which was not the stillness of peace. It was the calmness of despair — the dreadful self-composure of a man whose struggles with conscience are at an end — from whose future every hope of joy on earth below, or in heaven above, has vanished, never to return; — who had no thought, no feeling, no desire, that did not centre in a single purpose — a purpose dark and terrible as the hell from which it sprung. The cherished dream of

his life had been rudely swept away. He had fondly hoped, that, when Julia was convinced of the unworthiness of her lover, she would banish him from her memory; and he calculated that when the first paroxysm of disappointment was over, she might be induced to listen with favor to his own suit. That hopeful calculation was now effectually destroyed. Ruined, undone, what could that stained and guilty thing ever be to him? Still he loved her. The knowledge that she was no longer pure and innocent, while it placed an impassable barrier between them, broke no one thread of the strong cord that bound him. So far from including her in the vengeance he meditated, he would almost have foregone that revenge itself if it threatened to subject her to the possibility of exposure.

"It will not do," he said, "to let even John know the horrid truth. I have cause enough to quarrel with Mr. Taliafero without referring to this last damning deed. They may hang me, if they catch me, unless I reveal it. If so, welcome be the gallows and the rope, for life is not worth enough to be preserved at such a price. I would hang fifty times over, rather than have the finger of scorn pointed at that erring girl."

The next day, when he met his friend, he said without apparent emotion —

"So, John, Mr. Taliafero was your guest again last night."

"Yes, and when I saw him come in with Julia hanging on his arm, I found it difficult to keep my hands from his throat."

"Never mind, there is time enough for that. I have concluded that it would be improper to make the exposure at your father's house. We can walk along the road, and wait for him as he returns to the village. Get your rifle, and let us go; it is near his usual time for passing."

Proceeding up the road for a considerable distance, they seated themselves upon a fallen tree, and waited his approach. It was not long before they heard the sound of a horse's feet.

Placing himself directly in the road, when Taliafero came up, Mabry Gray laid his hand upon the bridle, and said sternly,

"We have some business with you this morning, Mr. Taliafero, and you will oblige us by dismounting."

Taliafero liked neither the tone in which this was said, nor the countenance of the man who said it. He did not suppose that either of the persons he had encountered could know anything to his prejudice. It was his own consciousness of guilt that made his cheek grow a shade paler, as he replied,

"I am already beyond my time, and it is needful I should speed on to the village. Whatever business you have with me may, I suppose, be transacted there."

"Our business must be settled here, sir, and *now*."

"Then, gentlemen," was the response, as he leaped to the ground, and threw the rein over a bush, "you will oblige me by using some dispatch; for I tell you again, I am behind my time."

Without a word, Gray drew a copy of Mr. Brantly's letter from his pocket, and handed it to him. He took it, and read it slowly. Both Gray and Allison watched his countenance in vain for any sign of guilt. Whatever were his feelings, those marble features were too completely under his control, to exhibit any emotion he did not choose to appear. He held it in his hand much longer than was necessary to decypher its contents — probably debating with himself what course to pursue. Thought is active under such circumstances. His resolution was soon taken. Dropping the letter on the ground, he walked up to John Allison, and addressed him with the tone of an injured man:

"To you, Mr. Allison, as the brother of the lady to whom it refers, it is proper I should say, that letter is a base calumny. In three days I will prove it so, to your entire satisfaction. As to this person," he continued, turning to Gray, "I know not by what right he ventures to meddle with my affairs, and I

must be excused if I refuse to vouchsafe to him either a denial or an apology."

"Liar and villain!" was the fierce retort, "I could breathe a word in your ear, which would turn even your brazen cheek to an ashy whiteness. But I did not seek this interview to hear you whine, or see you cringe. I would rather you should do as you have done, and turn, like the wolf that you are, upon the herdsman who has caught you in the sheep-fold — Take that!"

As the words passed his lips, he dealt Taliafero a blow with his clenched hand, which felled him to the earth, and brought the blood in torrents from his mouth and nostrils. Springing up, he drew a dagger from his bosom, and rushed upon his assailant. He was met by a blow from the rifle-barrel of Gray, and again fell to the ground, stunned and senseless. Rising slowly, Robert Taliafero eyed his enemy with concentrated passion:

"We shall meet again," he fiercely exclaimed, "with more equal weapons."

"Now, sir. Let it be now. Take John's rifle; he will measure the ground, and give the word."

"No, sir, not now, nor in this plight. You have taken too good care to render my aim uncertain; but we will meet, and that soon."

"Ay! we will meet, if I have to hunt you to the ends of the earth; and when we do meet, this world will have a villain less, and hell will gain a fiend."

"I shall save you the trouble of a search, sir, by coming to hunt you."

So saying, he mounted his horse and galloped rapidly away.

"What do you think he will do, John?" asked Gray, as they walked homeward.

"Send you a message, of course, and fight it out to the death. He is no coward, whatever else he may be."

"No, he is no coward; but there is something weighing on his conscience, that you dream not of. In one hour from this time, he will be making his preparations to depart. The moon rises about five o'clock — by seven, he will be on the road to Wilmington. We must meet him, and give him a chance to redeem his pledge."

Sure enough, that day Mr. Taliafero informed his landlord that he had received letters, urgently requiring his immediate presence in Wilmington. He said, that as he wished to travel rapidly, he should leave the greater part of his baggage with his host; and if he did not return in a few days, he would write where to send it. "These nights," he continued, "are very bright, and not too cool. I will start after supper, and ride twenty-five or thirty miles of the journey to-night."

At the time mentioned, Taliafero was on the road. He had ridden about three miles when just as he approached an old, uncultivated field, through which the highway wound, two men rode out from a cross-road and reined up before him. It needed no second glance to tell who these night-riders were, for Mabry Gray at once saluted him in a scornful, jeering tone:

"You have kept your word, Mr. Taliafero, and hunted me up; though in good truth it is a strange place to look for me."

"I am on my way to Wilmington, sir, to disprove the vile slanders in that letter with a sight of which you favored me this morning: on my return, doubt not that I shall find you soon enough."

"Excuse me, sir; I am an impatient man. I am afraid some of the proof can not be found in Wilmington, and then it will be necessary for you to travel to one of those sunny isles where the orange and the citron bloom, to gather up the missing links."

This allusion to his conversation with Julia, blanched the cheek of Taliafero for a moment; but it soon gave place to the hue of a deadlier passion. He could not tell how far Gray's

knowledge extended, but he saw that he knew enough to make him dangerous, and, to do him justice, it was more on Julia's account than his own, that he now became as anxious for the encounter as his enemy could desire.

"I have no weapon," he said after a short pause, "but I suppose Mr. Allison will loan me his."

"Oh! yes, John will loan you his gun, measure the ground, and give us the word. We must do the rest ourselves."

Their horses were tied, and the three walked into the open field.

"What distance shall I measure?" Inquired Allison.

"Thirty paces," replied Gray, "is enough for moonlight practice. Let it be that, unless Mr. Taliafero prefers another distance."

"I am satisfied," was the rejoinder. "And now, sir, while he is stepping off the ground, you and I may as well toss up for choice of positions."

The chaste moon, as she went up the sky, robed in all her silvery beauty, looked sorrowfully down upon the fearful scene. Fearful from its unnatural calmness — fearful from its very loneliness. Far away from any human habitation; with but a solitary witness; beneath a sky whose mild and tender light might have softened the bloodiest instinct into a lover's yearning fondness, two men were coolly preparing to sacrifice a soul to Satan.

The ground was measured, the terms of firing arranged, and the parties stepped to their respective positions. At the word, both rifles were discharged so nearly together, that it seemed but one report. Taliafero stood for a moment stiff and rigid — then his head drooped upon his breast — the rifle dropped from his nerveless hands — he staggered forward, and fell heavily to the ground. John Allison ran to him, and lifted him partially up. No sign of life could be detected. He opened his vest and shirt, and found that the ball had entered

just below the left nipple. Letting him sink down again upon the grass, he picked up his rifle, and returned to Gray.

"Is he dead?" inquired the latter.

"Yes, I think the ball must have passed through his heart. He never groaned. Are you hurt?"

"A little. His bullet grazed my breast, and it is bleeding pretty freely, but I do not think it has gone deeper than the skin. Let us ride back to my house at once, for I must be far away from here by day-light."

The wind was sighing through the pine-trees with that peculiar moaning sound, which is never elsewhere heard, either on the ocean or the land. To Mabry Gray, it seemed like the wail of nature over the spirit that had fled, and the dark doom of the one that remained. The eager and burning thirst for blood, which had shut out all thought, all apprehension of the consequences, was appeased; and fearfully, as he rode through the lonely forest, grew up the conviction, that henceforth he should be, like Cain, "a fugitive, and a vagabond in the earth;" and, he added with melancholy and prophetic foresight; "it shall come to pass that every one that findeth me shall slay me."

CHAPTER III.

"Saint Mary! what a scene is here!
I've traversed many a mountain strand,
Abroad and in my native land,
And it has been my lot to tread
Where safety more than pleasure led;
Thus, many a waste I've wandered o'er,
Clombe many a crag, crossed many a moor,
But, by my halidome,
A scene so rude, so wild as this,
Yet so sublime in barrenness,
Ne'er did my wandering footsteps press,
Where'er I happed to roam."

It was a sabbath morning — a sabbath morning in autumn, calm, clear, and quiet. A day when the pure heart lies down and is still, and the panting soul longs to mount upwards to the throne of the Almighty. The soothing influences of the day and the hour were lost upon Julia Allison. She had been all the morning restless, nervous, impatient. She tried to read: her eye had scarcely glanced at the pages of the volume, before she threw it down, and walked to the door, in eager expectation of the arrival of Robert Taliafero. He had not visited her the night before, as he had promised. It was the first time he had disappointed her, and she could not chase away a nameless dread of impending evil. Mr. Allison assembled his family in the sitting-room as usual, for the purpose of reading to them from the Book of Life. It was the last chapter of Isaiah; and he had just concluded the verse beginning,

"And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcases of the men who have transgressed against me," when old Hector

appeared at the door, with a letter in his hand. The manner of the old servant attracted Mr. Allison's attention, and it was with an uneasy feeling, that he looked at the address, and tore open the epistle.

"I have little time," it ran, "for explanation. The inclosed letter from Mr. Brantly will show you that a viper has crawled into the bosom of your family, and poisoned its peace. His dead body is lying near the blasted pine, in the old field on the Wilmington road. He fell in fair fight, as your son will testify, and the mark of his bullet is now upon my breast. Still I do not choose to undergo the shame and mortification of a public trial for murder. I shall therefore seek another land for awhile; it may be forever. Your own excellent judgment will tell you best how to break the news to Julia. If I were permitted to advise, I would say, let her know first how unworthy Mr. Taliafero was of her regard; and when she has recovered from that shock, you may communicate the fate that befel him. John goes with me. If he remained, he would be indicted as an accessory. You will hear from us, as soon as it is safe to write.

"Take care of my old servants, and let them have all they can make on the place.

MABRY GRAY."

To this was appended a postscript from John Allison:

"It was fairly done, father. Mr. Taliafero had my rifle, and they fired together at the word. It was a better fate than he deserved, and I trust Julia will soon forget the vile wretch she has so much reason to detest."

Alas! John Allison little knew there was that between his sister and Robert Taliafero, which made forgetfulness impossible.

The old man read the papers, folded them up carefully, and placed them in his pocket; then kneeling in the midst of his family, turned for comfort and support to his God.

"Thou hast afflicted me sorely, oh! Lord, but thine is the power, and the right, and I know that you never chasten, save for some good end of thine inscrutable benevolence. We come before thee on this, thy holy sabbath, not to murmur or complain, but to thank thee for the many blessings thou hast heretofore showered upon us, and to entreat humbly that the sorrows now impending over this house, may be made as light to the sufferers, as our manifold transgressions will admit. To thee we owe every joy that has gladdened the pathway of life — from thee we received them, and if it should be thy good pleasure to withdraw them all, still let us kneel at thy footstool with hearts subdued and softened, not hardened by iniquity, or rankling with resentment. Teach us to feel that every dispensation is ordered for the true good of thy people, and give us to understand how weak and wicked it is, for the poor worms of a day, to question a wisdom which is incomprehensible, and a justice whose ends we know not, and can not know.

"Thou art the rock to which all must flee when the storm cometh, and the waves are white with the foam of their wrath. Receive us into thy favor, and judge us not according to our deeds, for we know that they are wicked continually, but rather according to thine own merciful attributes.

"Sole Lord of Heaven, and earth, and all the starry spheres, we bow ourselves to the dust before thee; owning that we are nothing in ourselves, and asking forgiveness only through the atoning blood of thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ."

Rising from his knees, he drew the letter of Mr. Brantly from his pocket, and handing it to his daughter, said sorrowfully,

"It is needful you should know the contents of this letter, my daughter, without delay. I trust you will bear it as becomes you."

With nervous haste she seized the paper, for her father's

extraordinary prayer had excited her curiosity, and partially prepared her to expect some painful communication. She read it rapidly — threw it upon the floor, and stamping it passionately with her tiny foot, exclaimed,

"It is false! — false as the fiend who concocted it!"

"For shame, my child!" was the prompt rebuke. "This violence becomes neither you, nor the occasion. Mr. Brantly is known to me as an upright and a truthful man; and Mabry Gray, to whom this letter is addressed, whatever may be his faults, has never, to my knowledge, stained his lips with a falsehood. I fear me, it is too true."

The color went and came from the cheek of Julia Allison — for a brief space, her bosom heaved and swelled with tumultuous emotions; then as if exhausted in the struggle, her blood seemed to stagnate in her veins. With a low groan, she fell senseless on the floor. Raising her in his still sinewy arms, Mr. Allison bore his daughter to her chamber. Restoratives were applied — the blood once more began to flow through its accustomed channels, though with a sickly languid life. Finding that she might now be safely confided to the care of her mother, he left her to perform the disagreeable duty of riding over to the village, to communicate the news of Mr. Taliafero's death. The excitement caused by such an announcement in a little country town, together with the bustle of getting up a party to bring in the body, and give it the rites of sepulture, saved him from annoying questions at the time. It was not until the next day that a magistrate, with another citizen, rode over to inquire what he knew of the fatal occurrence.

"He was killed," was the response, "by Mabry Gray. Killed, as I am informed, and as I believe, in fair fight, with equal weapons. The deed is murder in the eye of the law, as well as in that of God. Still you are well aware that in this

section, it would be difficult to find a jury who would so pronounce it."

To an inquiry as to how he became possessed of this information, he answered, "By a brief note from Gray himself."

"Can I see that note? It will be useful at the coroner's inquest."

"I destroyed it to prevent it from falling into the hands of my family; from whom I have strong reasons for wishing that this painful event may be concealed, until such time as I myself think proper to communicate it."

The whole neighborhood were well acquainted with the relations both Mabry Gray and Robert Taliafero held to the family of Mr. Allison; and the magistrate took his departure without further question, merely informing Mr. Allison, that he was expected to attend as a witness before the coroner's jury.

Strange hands committed the body of Robert Taliafero to the earth. Strangers stood around his grave, and not a tear bedewed the sod that covered him. No one thought of pursuing his slayer. No one offered a reward for his apprehension. From infancy, Mabry Gray had been noted among them for gentleness, and kindness of heart. All believed that the provocation which induced him to dye his hands in blood, must have been deep and deadly. Moreover, in common with the generality of the people of the Southern States, they had a strong repugnance to aid in placing any one within the clutches of the law, who had been so unfortunate as to kill another in a fair, open, and manly encounter. In such cases it was generally considered, that the duty of the citizen required him to go no farther than to give his aid to the state authorities when properly called on for the purpose.

Earth had received back its boon of earth. An animated tool had ceased to perform its part in the great work of creation. Where had the spirit gone? and what the sentence that

greeted its resurrection? Far away beyond the stars, a judge is seated on his awful throne. Before him is a mighty scroll, on which the deeds of a lifetime are written. A pleader on either hand rises up to address the omnipotent.

"Here," said Mercy, pointing to the scroll, "is endowed a temple dedicated to the living God."

"Here," answered Justice, "fraud and falsehood wrung the price from an honest trader's purse."

"Here," said Mercy, "a widow's tears were dried, and a hungry orphan fed."

"Here," answered Justice, "a virgin's years were stained, and dust, and ashes, heaped upon a grey-haired mother's head."

And so through the long catalogue, the soft petition is met by the stern response. With whom does the triumph rest? Which speaker pleads in vain?

Oh! not to the clods of a little orb like this, may the great secret be revealed. Poor creeping things, who hug a shadowy phantom to your bosoms, and call it *reason*, drop the plumage of your pride; for the ant is your mate, and comprehends as well as thou dost, the mysteries of an hereafter.

The doom of Robert Taliafero is written above: that of his victim is to be traced a little longer upon earth. When the stupefying effects of the swoon into which Julia Allison had fallen passed away, it was succeeded by a raging fever. For many days her life hung trembling in a doubtful balance. At length she began gradually to recover. The crisis of the disease was over. Physical endurance had triumphed over the shock of mental torture. Her first inquiry was for Taliafero. She was told that the physician had enjoined absolute quiet, and she must not speak upon any agitating topic. Other days rolled by, and much of her strength returned. Addressing her mother, who was by her side, she said,

"It is better I should know the worst, mother, than be kept in suspense. Was that horrid letter true?"

"Your father has taken steps to ascertain. We thought it best to be certain, though neither of us doubts its truth."

"Then he has not been here since that dreadful day."

"He has not."

She asked no more. The last stroke had fallen, and the quivering life of hope that remained was finally extinguished. Disease departed from her frame — her household duties were attended to as usual, but the shadow never left her heart. It was months before she learned the death of Taliafero. When it was communicated she received it coldly, merely remarking,

"It is a name I have been struggling to banish from my memory, and in God's good time I doubt not I shall succeed. It is true, he has dried up my earthly joys at the fountain; but there is hope beyond the grave, and the water of which Jesus spoke to the woman of Samaria is in reach of all who seek it with penitence and prayer."

From that day his name was never uttered by her. Like a little stream upon a level ground, which creeps through hedge and brambles without a voice, and almost without visible motion, so went by days and months of her pilgrimage upon earth.

We must leave the reader's imagination to paint the events which immediately followed upon the banks of the Cape Fear. The course of our story leads us to another, and a nobler stream. On the night of Taliafero's death, Gray and Allison had ridden rapidly for the western mountains. Crossing these, they reached Knoxville, after a hard and fatiguing journey, sold their horses, purchased a skiff, and loading it with provisions, blankets, a kettle, and a frying-pan, pushed out upon the waters, and pulled down the river. They knew nothing of its currents, rocks, or sand-bars, and trusted themselves to the stream to avoid what they supposed might be a greater danger. If the officers of the law were on their track, this was

the surest means of baffling pursuit, holding out, as it did, the promise of an asylum in the Indian Territory. It is true, the laws of the United States had long been extended over the Cherokee Indians. Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia, had likewise extended their laws over such portions of the territory as lay within their respective limits. Still, many lawless and desperate white men had settled among these untutored savages, who were always ready to conceal or protect any fugitives seeking shelter among them. Even the best disposed among the Indians, although offering no open resistance to the laws, refused to aid in their execution, naturally regarding it as an acknowledgment of a jurisdiction utterly destructive of their nationality. It was a knowledge of this which made our travellers anxious to reach their borders, where their future plans might be securely arranged. Nothing occurred to call for unusual exertion, until they passed the junction of the Holstien and the Clinch, and were upon the broad bosom of the Tennessee. It was now the month of November, eighteen hundred and thirty-two. The cold winds were sweeping through the gorges of the mountains, in fierce, though fitful blasts. Above them the dun clouds, sometimes rolling in solid column rapidly over the sky, then suddenly recoiling as they were met by an opposite current of air, looked like a mighty army swayed backwards and forwards by the changing fortunes of a doubtful day.

"We must make in for the bank," said Gray, "our little vessel rocks and tosses at every blast, as if its powers of resisting the storm were nearly exhausted. Besides, we make no headway against the wind, which is blowing directly up stream."

"I would rather keep on if possible," was the rejoinder. "The loss of a day may be serious to us."

"It is lost anyhow, for we can not get along against the wind, and we run the risk of losing our skiff in the effort."

The boat was accordingly pulled in to the shore. Fastening it securely to an overhanging tree, they lighted a fire, erected a rude tent, and prepared to pass the time as comfortably as circumstances would allow. The spot where their temporary camp was pitched, was one from which the pencil of an artist might have won immortality. The mountain sloped gradually upward from the river, for the distance of half a mile, then abruptly reared its rock-ribbed sides perpendicularly to the clouds. Upon the dark forest, the autumn frosts had written their story of decay and blight, yet the whole presented a scene lovely and sweet, in the midst of its melancholy — imposing and majestic from the very desolation hovering nigh. Not the desolation of man; which is always gloomy, always sad; but the desolation of nature, which beautifies while it destroys: which walks through the land, clothed with a many-colored garment, imparting to the bare rock a wilder grandeur, and stealing away from the green leaves their verdure, only to robe them with a thousand tints more brilliant than the Tyrian dye, to brighten and to gladden their fall. From a portion of the trees, the wind had already stripped their foliage. From others again, the dull russet color proclaimed that the sap of life was withdrawn, and though they still clung to the parent stem, it was with a feeble and lingering hold, which the next rain would loosen, and the next wind sweep away. There were others of a harder nature, from which the bright green of summer had departed, but which the cold and the frost had as yet only tinged with a brilliant purple. Scattered here and there, was a species of birch, the white coating of whose leaves contrasted strongly with the dark hues around. Higher up the mountain, the majestic cedar spread out its evergreen branches, bidding defiance to frost, and storm, and hail; wrapping his never-changing mantle about him with seemingly conscious pride, and like a proud beauty on a festal night, challenging, as a right, the admiration of the beholder.

Mingled with these, were mighty rocks, some grey and bare, others covered with the moss of ages. A solitary raven was perched upon a leafless tree, and Gray shuddered as its ominous croaking fell upon his ear. Almost ashamed of his emotions, yet panting to be alone, in order to indulge them unrestrained, he listened with delight to a proposition from his companion, to take his gun and stroll into the woods in search of game to add to their homely fare, while Gray remained to watch over their effects.

When John Allison was out of sight, he threw himself upon a blanket, within the tent, to brood over his blasted youth and ruined fortunes. Bitterly he cursed the hour that gave him birth; still more bitterly the circumstances that made him a wandering outcast. Too haughty and imperious to blame himself — too self-willed to examine into his own errors, he charged them all upon others, and easily reasoned himself into the belief, that never mortal had been wronged and outraged like himself. Oh! how often has reasoning like this led the young and the passionate through a clouded life, to a dark and stormy end. Let the conviction once grow up in the mind, that we are sufferers without fault of our own — that other hands, not our ungoverned passions, have spread the clouds above us, and all hope of reformation is at an end, and the evil one has a tool it is no longer necessary to tempt. To such a heart every new trial brings added bitterness, because, to its perverted reason, every one is but another wrong — another undeserved affliction; and the chastening which heaven mercifully sends to soften, to subdue, and to save, becomes a poisoned arrow that festers, and rankles, and destroys. Nor is there in the whole store of *after prosperity*, a charm to drive away the horrible curse. If good fortune attends him, there are pride and self-love to claim it as the result of his own unaided efforts. His misanthropy may be robbed of a portion of its gloom, but it is misanthropy nevertheless. His heart

is still hard and pitiless. Wealth and power are regarded only because they are indispensable ministers to the gratification of his appetites and desires, and useful instruments of his revenge.

In the hasty retrospect he was now making, there was much to deceive and mislead a judgment better tried and disciplined than that of Mabry Gray. His life had been in most respects blameless, and he felt conscious of an earnest desire to promote the happiness of those with whom he had mingled. It was not for one so young to scan too closely the inborn sinfulness of a nature that had so readily yielded to the first temptation, however great that temptation might be. He knew himself a sufferer — he believed he was so without any fault of his own — beyond that, he did not inquire. A tenderer plant would have drooped and died — he became like the tree the lightning has riven, dry, hard, sapless, but as firmly rooted as ever. He traced back the years of existence, only to gather poisons more deadly than any ever compounded by the Italian, Rene Armandi. So absorbed was he by the gloomy thoughts crowding his mind, that he heard not the report of his companion's rifle, and was only aroused by the near approach of Allison, exclaiming in a loud voice,

"Come, Mabry, come. I have killed a deer. You must help me get it into camp."

Before this was accomplished, the gusty day grew calm and clear. The sun came forth from behind his cloudy screen, bathing the lofty mountain and the many-colored forest with a golden lustre. Here and there, in the hollows of the mountains, there was a dark space which the sunbeam could not light; and as the eye rested upon them, and then turned to the rocky summits revelling in its rays, it was easy to fancy that the hand of the Deity had painted on the face of Nature a picture of human life. It is upon the loftiest peak that the sunbeam most loves to linger; yet that peak is hard, rugged,

and barren — no verdure springs from the flinty soil — no blushing flower spreads its perfume over the stony height. On the other hand, the quiet dell is the last to catch, and the first to lose, Sol's warm caress; though there it is that bud and blossom flourish — there it is that the murmuring brook pours its soft melody upon the ear, and the forest leaf is painted with the brightest green. So in this world, it not unfrequently happens that the smiles of fortune are lavished upon those whose hearts are as stony as the mountain peaks, while the gentle and affectionate struggle on through clouds and shadows to the weary journey's end. Why this is so, is a mystery the human mind in vain seeks to penetrate. The *fact* is apparent — the *reason* beyond our ken. Oftentimes we see the wrong triumphant, and the right oppressed. Intolerance, oppression, and crime, walk abroad unpunished, if not unreproved. The vicious bask in the sunshine of prosperity, while the good man struggles with penury; and the meek, and the pious, are borne down with affliction. These are visible, tangible realities. The solace of the wretched is to be found in the Confession of Faith of at least one Christian sect: "God, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, did foreordain whatsoever comes to pass." Whatever He has ordered must be for the best. His justice — His mercy, are the common inheritance of all; and it is entirely reconcilable with both, that the inequalities we witness here shall be amply recompensed hereafter.

The sun had gone down, and Gray and Allison were seated by the huge fire in front of the tent to enjoy the evening repast. They had much to learn of the woodman's art; but exercise is a keen sharpener of the appetite, and, however imperfect their cookery, the meal was dispatched with a relish an epicure would have envied. Both were wearied, and they early sought that repose a day of toil rarely fails to render grateful. With the morning their little skiff was again float-

ing upon the current of the romantic Tennessee. Rapidly their watery journey was continued until they pulled up in the shadow of Look-out Mountain, from whose lofty summit the territories of four States are visible. The place was then an Indian landing, and could boast of only a few rude huts, built chiefly for purposes of traffic with the descending flat-boats. Since that time, the anvil, the plane, and the steam-engine, have invaded its solitude. The wild Indian has been driven to a far distant home — the bear and the panther have disappeared; and if a solitary deer, the last survivor of an immense herd, is occasionally found skulking in the gorges of the mountains, it is regarded with wondering admiration. A city has grown up upon the site, and civilized man has converted the desert into a mart. Time is a great magician, and even those who doubt the beneficence of all his changes, may dwell with admiration upon the stupendous results. At the time of which we write, the common receptacle for travellers was a kind of half tavern, half grocery, upon the bank. Here our fugitives took refuge for the night. And such a night! How full of horrors to men reared as they had been in all the respectful observances of a well-regulated and virtuous family! Drinking, gambling, fiddling, dancing, shouting, swearing, made a Pandemonium of the smoky rooms from the going down of the sun to his rising in the morning. Between their sleeping room and the public one, there was nothing save a board partition, through which every sound was audible, while large cracks in the rough wall afforded almost equal advantages to the sense of sight. Sleep was impossible, and cold chills crept over them as the disgusting orgies proceeded. Indians, whites, half-breeds, males and females, mingled in the dreadful revelry. Throughout the long night, Gray watched its progress with a sense of loathing, not unmixed with fear. Although a blood-stained outcast, he felt no degradation until now. His opponent had fallen in open encounter, where life

was frankly staked against life. There was much, too, in the circumstances accompanying the deed to rob the sting of conscience of a portion of its pangs, and he was by no means prepared for the bitter dregs in the bottom of the cup he was compelled to drain. That his crime should drive him among desperate adventurers, he had deemed probable; but this low debauchery, this crawling down to the level of the brutes, had in it something unspeakably horrible. He little imagined that a day would come to him when such scenes would be far from unfamiliar, and such acts would call forth no condemnation. It was new to him, now, however—new and fearful; and he felt that to remain in such a lodging an hour longer than could be avoided, would be an insult to his mother's memory. His friend was equally anxious for a change. Accordingly, the first thing they did in the morning, was to institute inquiries as to the possibility of procuring other quarters. The flat-boat of a trader was cabled a short distance above the landing. With some difficulty they prevailed upon its owner to receive them on board as boarders, and their baggage was soon transferred to this rough abode. To the reader who is unacquainted with the early customs of the south-west in general, and of the Tennessee river in particular, it may be necessary to say, that at the period when the waters of the river were innocent of any such disturbance as that made by the paddle-wheels of a steamboat—and the mountains, through which it cuts its way, were unvisited by the "iron horse," it was the custom in East Tennessee to build large flat-boats during the summer, which were loaded with iron, salt, meal, potatoes, flour, &c. With the first rise of the waters, in the fall or winter, these boats were started down the stream on a trading expedition. The owner, for the most part, and one or two "hands," embarked on it. Carrying their own provisions, bedding, and other necessaries, the boat for the time became their domicil. They were destined for no particular

market, the object being to trade whenever and wherever a fair profit could be realized. When they arrived at a landing where there was a probability of making sales, the boat was pulled into the bank, and cabled. The owner went ashore to make his inquiries — if these were satisfactory, he remained a day, or a week, or a month, according to the state of the market. When the market grew dull, he slipped his cable, pushed out into the stream, and floated with the current to another landing. This was repeated until the cargo was disposed of; by which time he had generally reached that portion of the stream from which the cotton bales of the Tennessee valley were shipped. His next object was to sell his boat to the "freighters,"—a business generally concluded with little loss of time. The boatman then shouldered his pack, and trudged back on foot in the spring, to the home he had left in the autumn.

Modern science, and improvement, have made sad havoc of the flat-boat traffic. A solitary boat may still be seen at times floating upon the stream, but *the system* has departed. Like the wild fowl, whose mates have been destroyed by the hunter's art, it lingers in melancholy loneliness upon the waters that once were peopled with its kind.

It was impossible to live with a flat-boat-man of the "old school," for three consecutive days without growing as familiar with him, as you would with a city acquaintance in a twelvemonth. Gray was soon upon the best terms with his host. He was a large, raw-boned, broad-shouldered, powerful man, whose sinews had been hardened by constant exercise, to the consistency of iron. Light-hearted and good-humored, there was nothing in the world he loved better than fiddling and dancing; unless it might be fisticuffs and whiskey: of which latter article, he boasted that he could "carry a quart under his belt, and walk the edge of an inch plank from his boat to the shore." It can not be said that he was ever known to

miss an opportunity of mingling in a fray, but justice requires the fact should also be chronicled, that it was always done upon the same principle Richard of England proposed a duel with Saladin, viz. to prove his manhood. He had no idea of malice as connected with a fair, stand-up, and knock-down fight. The man he had one minute pummelled to a jelly, he would, the next, convey to his boat, wash his bruises, and drench him with whiskey. Nor did the slightest feeling of anger remain with him, if he happened to be worsted in the encounter. He looked upon the whole thing as a simple trial of strength and endurance; and no matter how it ended, it was perfectly understood that no ill blood was to follow. Among his other characteristics, there was a large amount of strong common sense, aided by such knowledge of the world as might be picked up during his trading career, which embraced several expeditions to New Orleans, then the Ultima Thule of all boatmen upon the upper tributaries of the Mississippi.

Their supper was the ordinary fare of boatmen; — fried bacon, roasted potatoes, coffee without cream, and corn-bread. The host, whose name was Neel, appeared to have an indistinct impression that this might not be exactly as palatable to uninitiated strangers, as a meal served up in one of the fashionable hotels of New Orleans.

"I reckon," he said, "that you have been used to better fare, and I will mend it with some venison to-morrow, unless the d—n—d half-breeds on the bank are too lazy to kill a deer."

His guests courteously replied, that they were quite contented with any thing Mr. Neel himself could put up with.

"Call me Jack. Even the boys here never think of calling me by any other name."

The boys alluded to, were two boatmen nearly as powerful as himself, whom he had hired to assist in the management

of his craft, and whose long, unshaven beards would have done honor to the days of Moses.

As soon as the meal was dispatched, Jack Neel proposed that Gray and Allison should accompany him to the tavern and participate in the night's amusement. To his surprise the invitation was declined. Mistaking the cause, he said encouragingly,

"They are a rough set, certain; though they are mighty apt to be civil to a stranger at the worst, and I would like to see a man look cross at a friend who went there under my wing. As to the gals, they will be sure 'to cotton to you,' if for nothing else in the world, than because they never seed you before."

Gray explained that he had no fears of personal ill treatment, and wishing Mr. Neel all possible enjoyment at the "frolic," persisted in declining to accompany him.

"Well," replied the boatman, internally wondering how any man could refuse so tempting an offer; — "well, if you won't go, and will stay with the boat, I'll give the boys a holiday, and take them along with me."

No proposition could have been more acceptable to the boys. The three started off in high glee, leaving the boat, and everything it contained, in the custody of two strangers they had never heard of twenty-four hours before. If any one had asked Jack Neel to explain this imprudent confidence, he would have answered, "God Almighty writes a mighty plain hand, and I could see with half an eye them fellows was honest." There was another cause which doubtless operated upon him, though he might not have assigned it. The most common crime of cities, and crowded districts, was unknown in the back-woods. They would drink, swear, fight, and sometimes kill. Larceny and robbery were out of the question. They were loth to believe that a white man *could* steal, and when they heard of such things in their occasional trips

to New Orleans, they were sure to charge them upon "the d—n–d French and Spaniards, who were half mulattoes anyhow." If the genuine flat-boatman of the South-West was often dissolute, often reckless of moral restraint, at least he was always manly—always honest. They were, in a great degree, an unlettered race. Their annual rovings upon the river, withdrew them for long periods from the wholesome restraints of public opinion. Their traffic necessarily brought them in contact with the bad, as well as the good, and their laborious avocation made every species of relaxation an enjoyment. No wonder they eagerly plunged into every kind of excitement, and thought not, and cared not, what name the moralist might bestow upon it. I have seen an army in possession of a conquered city, and educated gentlemen, who, at home, were rigidly observant of all the proprieties of life, mingling with high delight in scenes as debasing as any ever enacted on the South-Western waters. Without intending to excuse the one or the other, it is but fair that the weakness of human nature should be taken into the account, and that some allowance should be made for the circumstances surrounding both.

With the morning, the boatmen returned. The "frolic" had been one of unusual interest, and peals of laughter resounded through the boat as they recounted how this one "got drunk, and cavorted, and fell cowhallop into Betsey Sims's lap." Or how that one became bewildered in the dance, not knowing exactly who was his *vis-a-vis*, when the fiddler came to his relief, by bawling out, at the top of his voice, "Dance to the gal with a hole in her stocking." "And," continued the narrator, "didn't she shake a nasty foot when Bill did begin to buck up to her!"

Many other scenes and incidents were related with an exuberant glee which left no doubt that Jack Neel and his boys had enjoyed themselves to their hearts' content. We pause

not to speculate upon the character of that enjoyment. It *was* enjoyment; vicious, if you choose, but not half so bad as the "Free-love" communions abounding in the moral and religious atmosphere to the northward of the Potomac — not a whit worse than the polished hypocrisy, the insinuated slander, and the lewd contact of the sexes, so familiar to the gilded saloons of cities, where well-bred damsels esteem it unfashionable to expose less than half a leg, and all the breast.

When breakfast was over, Gray took his host aside, and, explaining to him that his object was to reach the Mexican province of Texas, asked his advice as to the best route to be pursued. "Well, there's several ways," was the response, "and none of them the best. If you want to go quietly and cheaply, stay on my boat until I get down among the freighters; then take a cotton-boat to the mouth of Red River. The boys will charge you nothing, except to help them on a pinch, and pinches will come d—n–d often, after you strike the Mississippi."

"How long will it take to reach Red River?"

"That's as luck will have it. May-be two months — may-be three. We have to allow for the winds, the fogs, and the sawyers."

"That is slow travelling," said Gray.

"Slow, but sure. No sheriff, or deputy, will board a flat-boat, unless he happens to have a liking for a cold swim on a winter's day."

Upon consultation with John Allison, it was determined to adopt the plan Neel suggested. Sales at Ross's Landing were getting dull, and the trader prepared to seek another market. Gray stood upon the deck by the steersman when the cable was slipped, and the heavy boat swung lazily into the stream. A few strokes from the long oars at the bow aided her passage to the main current of the river. The oars were then unshipped, and the labors of all but the steersman were at an end. The river here cuts its way through the heart of the

Cumberland Mountains. Lofty peaks and rugged crags rise up on either hand. On some, a thick covering of trees stretches upward, from the water's edge to the clouds. Over these, Autumn had thrown her many-colored mantle. Gold, purple, and green, glittered in the rays of the rising sun. The beauty of the rainbow was there, and, mingled with that beauty, was a wild and terrible grandeur, which chastened admiration with awe. No cultivated field marred the vastness of the prospect. No cottage peeped from among the giant trees. Nature stretched her sceptre over the scene, and man, humbled and abashed at the majesty of her works, cowered and trembled as he gazed. The boat glides on, and now another view of the mighty panorama is presented. Here no ledges intervene — no trees obstruct the sight. Sudden, abrupt, from the midst of the waters, the solid rock rears itself in desolate magnificence towards the skies. Upon its inhospitable sides no verdure is visible; for even the tenacious moss seeks in vain a crevice where a foothold may be secured. Steep and regular as a castle wall, it bares its adamantine breast to the north wind's blast, and laughs in scorn at the feeble waves that beat against its base. Here the river grows jealous, and demands its share of admiration. It may not rival the grandeur of the land, but a rushing noise proclaims that danger and death are brooding over the waters, and terror lends its aid to win for the envious stream the traveller's sole attention. We are nearing the "Suck." Suddenly it is gathered in a narrow channel, and then rushes in a headlong volume for hundreds of yards, as if poured from a precipice.

"Up, boys," shouted Neel, "all of you to the steering-oar, and hold her steady."

The boat took the current, and even the hardy owner held his breath as it was dashed along with lightning speed by the foaming torrent. A moment followed — a moment of awful suspense — and it was tossing in the "boiling pot" below.

When this second danger was surmounted, Neel addressed his passengers:

"You'll travel a long ways, I'm thinking, before you come to such another jumping-off place as that."

"It is a fearful current, truly," Gray answered, "and I see no cause to produce it. The ground, so far as the mountains allow me to judge, is about the same level."

"None of us can tell what makes it; but it is thar, and a d—n–d ugly passage it is for a flat-boat."

"I suppose it is not so dangerous when the water is low."

"Just the other way. When the river is at dead low-water mark, it would trouble a streak of lightning to catch a boat from the head of the 'suck' to the 'pot.'"

Gray mused long upon the wonderful phenomenon he had witnessed, then turned again to the contemplation of the splendid scenery through which they were still floating. For a hundred miles it continued; but no pen can do it justice, no painter's art can embody its mingled beauty and magnificence. It must be seen to be appreciated; it must be *felt* to be remembered as it is. No scenery of our own land, or of others, equals it in extent or gorgeous splendor; and the traveller who has slept in the shadow of Orizaba, and clambered to the eternal snows of Popocatepetl, has still something to learn of the majesty of nature, if he has never floated upon the bosom of the Tennessee.

CHAPTER IV.

"Sad regrets from past existence
Came, like gales of chilling breath;
Shadowed in the forward distance
Lay the land of death."

THEIR intercourse with Jack Neel on the river had impressed Gray and Allison still more favorably with his excellent qualities. Like the milk of the cocoa-nut, which is covered by a hard, rough rind, so within that rude, unpolished frame, there was a gushing fountain of benevolence to which the unfortunate never applied in vain. He had drawn from Gray enough to be aware that he stood in peril of the law for having wiped out a deadly injury with blood. The deed, as he regarded it, constituted a claim upon his kindness that no exertion could be too great to meet. He himself selected the cotton-boat on which their voyage was to be prosecuted, and took care to inform the captain that they were gentlemen in whose welfare he felt so particular an interest, that it would not be safe to bring back a report of any misfortune having befallen them.

The reader must suppose the journey to have been accomplished, and our wanderers safely landed at Nacogdoches. At that day, but little was known of Texas or the Texans in the older states of the Union, and Gray and Allison were in almost complete ignorance of the country, its history, and its inhabitants. At Nacogdoches they learned for the first time that the settlers of that colony (Edwards's grant), goaded beyond endurance by the tyranny of the political chief,* and his minion,

* An officer whose rank corresponds to that of governor in the States.

the Alcalde, had a short time before broken out into revolt against the Mexican Government, and, by the aid of the Cherokee Indians under Fields, waged for some time successful war against the troops sent to subdue them. Finally, the American settlers of Austin's colony, on the Brazos, unaware of the many grievances which their brethren had to complain of, and fearful of the annulment of their own grants, united their forces with the Mexican troops. When information of these movements reached Nacogdoches, the citizens at once abandoned all further attempts at resistence, and most of them took refuge in the United States. At the instance of Stephen F. Austin, the Mexican commander issued a proclamation of general amnesty, inviting the settlers who had fled beyond the Sabine to return. Many availed themselves of the permission thus granted, and occupied their old homes in and around Nacogdoches. Tyranny, however, could not long rest from its pleasant avocations of cruelty and torture. The colonists were again subjected to every species of annoyance; often to imprisonment, and sometimes to death. The free spirit of men reared in the sunshine of American institutions, and retaining a proud remembrance of their revolutionary descent, could not brook so near an approach to absolute slavery. They had once submitted the case to a trial of arms, which had been decided against them by their own countrymen. They had every reason to suppose that another trial of the same kind would be attended by the same results. As a last resource, they abandoned their lands by scores; some to return to the United States, others to seek refuge in more favored parts of Texas. When these facts were ascertained, Gray and Allison determined to push on to Austin's Colony, where a happier state of things existed. By the exercise of the highest abilities, aided by the most consummate tact, Stephen F. Austin had managed to maintain friendly, and even cordial relations with the government of Mexico. His views respecting that distant province,

were always listened to with respect, and his requests generally granted. It is apparent from his letters, that he had long contemplated the eventual separation of Texas from Mexico, *but the pear was not yet ripe.* In his judgment the time had not yet arrived, when a declaration of independence could be hazarded with safety. Hence we find him promptly uniting with the government, to suppress the revolt at Nacogdoches. He had no idea of being hurried into a revolution, before he was prepared to make that revolution effective. Every day he was growing stronger, and as long as no active oppression was attempted, he could afford to wait the turn of events. The turbulence of a portion of the American settlers in Texas gave him great trouble and annoyance: still, in view of coming events, that he could not fail to foresee, he was unwilling to lose a single rifle from the country, and accordingly when the people of Nacogdoches were subdued, he made use of all his influence with Colonel Ahumada to procure a proclamation of amnesty, which he hoped would cause a return of most, if not all the refugees to the Territory they had abandoned. While thus maturing his plans, and quietly preparing the materials to insure success, events were occurring in the city of Mexico, which threatened shipwreck to all his hopes of the future. An election for President was held between Pedraza and Guerero. All the historians of the period agree, that Pedraza was regularly elected. Guerero feeling strong in the affections of the soldiery, alleged that the election was invalid, because his opponent had been guilty of bribery. The charge was doubtless true of both parties, but Guerero took effectual steps to prevent an investigation of his own conduct, by surrounding the Mexican Congress with his troops, and conveying to that body, an intimation that their personal safety materially depended upon his elevation to the Presidency. No Mexican Legislature was ever known to resist such an agument, and accordingly Guerero was declared the legal President of the

republic. The power thus obtained by fraud and violence, was of short duration. Guerero was in turn deposed and executed by Bustamente, the Vice-President, who at once assumed dictatorial powers. The favor Austin had enjoyed at the Mexican Capital now departed. A decree was issued establishing Custom-Houses and fortifications along the coast of Texas. The Custom-Houses were to serve the purpose of plundering the inhabitants; and the fortifications, besides protecting the soldiers of the despot, were to be used as prisons, for the confinement of such of the Texans as happened to incur the displeasure of the Mexican officials. By another decree, accusation was made equivalent to conviction. All accused persons were removed to these prison fortifications — denied the right of hearing the charges against them — of trial by jury, and of counsel for their defence. Every effort was made to obstruct further emigration from the United States, and many lesser grievances were of daily occurrence. The Texans began to feel that delay was more dangerous than immediate revolt. Some of their best and bravest were already in the dungeons of the tyrant — among them the immortal Travis — others might be expected soon to follow. With one accord they grasped their arms, resolving in the spirit of '76 to live free or die. It was not judged expedient, however, even yet, to sever all connection with the Federal Government. "Liberty and the constitution of 1824," was the rallying cry. What would have been the ultimate result of the struggle if it had then commenced, can be known only to the great Disposer of events. Fortunately for Texas, it was deferred yet a little longer. In the very crisis of her destiny, Santa Anna raised the standard of revolt against Bustamente, and declared for the Constitution of 1824. Although they knew very little of Santa Anna, and that little not to his credit, the Texans could have no hesitation about uniting themselves with the party of this unexpected ally. He was represented to be un-

grateful, dissolute, licentious, a gambler, and an infidel. How much of this was to be attributed to the interested calumnies of the Priests, they did not know. That he was an open reviler of the mummeries of the Catholic religion, was certain; and that he habitually spoke of the priesthood in terms of the bitterest contempt, was equally well established; but this was no great sin in the eyes of men whose opinions, if carefully fathomed, would have been found not widely variant from his own. Nor did they feel any disposition to institute rigid inquiries into the general complexion of his morals. A proclamation in favor of liberty and State rights was, in their eyes, a mantle sufficiently broad to cover many sins, and as long as he acted up to the proclamation, he found them his bravest and most incorruptible adherents. They were already arming upon their own account, when that proclamation reached them; and although every fortress in Texas was garrisoned by the soldiers of Bustamente, they boldly flung abroad the banner of his opponent. One hundred and fifteen Colonists under Colonel John Austin, stormed the fortress of Velasco. The heroic Travis — who had escaped from prison — with only twenty men, attacked and captured Anahuac. Nacogdoches fell soon afterwards, and when General Mexia arrived with reinforcements from Santa Anna, he found that every military post had been captured without his assistance, and all resistance was at an end.

So much of history was necessary to elucidate the events which are to follow, since (much as it may be regretted) the early history of Texas is even at this day a sealed book to the majority of American readers.

When Gray and Allison arrived at San Felipe de Austin, they took up quarters at a house of entertainment which might have been appropriately denominated a cross between a Spanish posada and a country inn on the borders of the United States. The house was a long one-story building, with a

thatched roof and dirt floors. Surrounding this building, and extending some distance back of it, was a high picketed fence, made of split logs, one end being driven deep into the ground, while near the top they were securely fastened together by strips of timber nailed along the entire length. At the back of the yard was a rough shed, with a rack for fodder and hay, no other provender being allowed to the traveller's horse at a Texan inn, where corn was much too valuable an article to be fed away to dumb brutes, and where in fact nine-tenths of the animals were accustomed to feed entirely on the prairie grass. Some fig trees were growing at each end of the house, and in front, between it and the fenee — the only green things within the dusky enclosure. Four or five pigs, who seemed wonderfully familiar with the interior of the premises, and about double that number of chickens, completed the outside of the picture. Inside, a rough table of heavy timber extended from one end of the middle room to the other. Equally rough benches were placed on either side. With the exception of a huge cupboard, it was bare of other furniture. The southern apartment boasted of a bed, two wooden chests, and three or four chairs, with deerskin bottoms. In one corner was a pile of dry hides, which were spread down at night as "pallets" for the children and two Mexican servant girls. This room was used as kitchen to the inn, and bed-chamber for the host and his family. In the northern division, there was a bench, a number of stools, and a pile of dry hides. No traveller in that primitive region asked or expected other bedding. It was taken for granted that every one carried his own blanket along with him; and if he did not, he was compelled to dispense with covering for the time. Whenever a guest felt inclined to repose, he took a hide from the pile, spread it upon the floor, or in the yard, according to his choice, wrapped himself in his blanket, and laid down upon a couch whose healthfulness amply compensated for its hardness. The landlord was

an American, who rejoiced in the possession of a Mexican wife, *i. e.*, half Spanish and half Indian. She had passed her fortieth year, and was rapidly accumulating that amount of fat for which her countrywomen are so justly celebrated. We of the Anglo-Saxon race are occasionally able to produce very fair specimens of fat women. Indeed, for single exhibitions, it is doubtful if we do not surpass our neighbors; but for shows of two or three thousand at a time, we are literally "nowhere." Let it not be understood that these remarks have any application to the señoritas. There is, to be sure, an observable plumpness about them — a plumpness, though, which adds to, rather than detracts from, their loveliness. It is only when the period of early womanhood has expired, and they have become staid matrons of forty, or thereabouts, that they begin to assume those magnificent dimensions which are unrivalled anywhere outside the limits of the miscalled Republic of Mexico. In general, this excessive corpulency produces its natural result of listless indolence. Our hostess was an exception to the rule. Whether it was from natural temperament, or from long association with her husband and his enterprising countrymen, she retained all the energy and the restless activity of her youthful years. From the first, she was struck with the manly form and handsome countenance of Mabry Gray, and soon established a friendship with him that influenced in a great degree the whole of his after life.

Men who were willing to work could not remain long in San Felipe, at that day, without finding employment. In less than a week, John Allison had obtained a situation in a mercantile house. Gray had other views. Unlike his friend, he was a rover by nature. In his bosom, too, there was a dark remembrance forever goading him on to the most desperate adventures. Henceforth he could live only amid the wildest excitements. He had made zealous friends of his host, James Saxon, and his wife Josefa. Even in that busy region, where

few people had the time or the inclination to attend to anybody's affairs besides their own, the frequent and long conferences between the three became the subject of remark, and the curious were piqued at their inability to discover what it could possibly mean. At length, a Mexican, attended by two servants, arrived and put up at the inn. Josefa welcomed him with every demonstration of affection, and at once conducted him to her own apartment. Sending for Gray, she introduced the stranger as her brother, Bartolo Piedras, at the same time bestowing upon her relative an amount of commendation that would have been regarded as rather extravagant eastward of the Mississippi. Gray, in his own turn, came in for a full share of praise; but as it was pronounced in Spanish, of which he did not understand a word, he lost the opportunity of profiting by a knowledge of his perfections.

That night an unusual number of guests crowded the public room; and Gray, spreading his hide beneath a fig-tree in the yard, stretched himself upon it. It was just such a night as that on which he had heard the trembling voice of Julia Allison pleading with Robert Taliafero to restore her blighted honor. A warmer sky was above him, and a balmier atmosphere around him; but there was the same moon, and there the same stars, that looked down upon him, as he sat by the old pine-tree far away in his native land, and witnessed the rending agony of that dreadful hour. A thousand and a thousand weary miles of forest and of mountain interposed between him and his secluded home on the waters of the Cape Fear. He had fled in vain from the scenes where every inanimate thing reminded him of his loss. In vain the violated laws of his country had been eluded. The moon and the stars travelled with him, mute mentors of his sorrow and his guilt. There was also another companion from whom he could not hope to escape on this side of the grave. No exile "from himself can flee." Wherever he wandered by day or by night,

memory would be continually calling up images to frighten repose from his breast. Even now he was living in the past. He heard once more the sound of the first clod that fell upon his mother's coffin, and an icy tremor curdled his veins. Every word of his parting interview with Julia was remembered. The little star he had fondly christened by her name, was shining on him, and fancy readily supplied the cloud, the pine-trees, and the fitful moaning of the wind. He lived again through that long night, whose every moment was an age of agony. With a mighty effort he turned from the dreary retrospect to the future. There no hope was gleaming — there he saw only a blood-red path, shadowed by lurid clouds, and ending in impenetrable gloom. Once more he sent his mind out upon an errand of discovery; but like the first dove that went forth from Noah's ark, it found all storm and darkness, and angry waves; and came back to him clothed in the habiliments of despair.

"Is it so?" was his stern reflection. "Well, I have passed through a furnace seven times heated, and may well grapple with woes more dread than any that are to come."

At the same hour, three persons assembled in the apartment of Josefa, whose consultations colored the destinies of thousands of whose existence they were unaware. A strange thing is human life! Sever but the feeblest thread of the mighty web, and blood and tears will flow from the farthest extreme. Drive but a single peasant from the culture of his vines on the hill-side, and a nation may be unchained by the deed. Scarce one of the great events in the world's history can be traced to causes commensurate with the results. In the very land of which we are writing, a dissolute Spaniard, driven by his vices from Old Spain, crushed a mighty empire into nothingness beneath his tread. Thus, the wildest improbability is often the lever with which the Omnipotent works. It is His decree that every act shall be followed by another, and another, and

another—that every chord, once struck, shall vibrate through the myriad strings of existence. Who shall say that it travels not on from star to star, sounding through all one universal diapason?

In the rude inn of a rude village, an unseen hand was shaping a mighty work. Josefa, her brother, and her husband—what were they but puppets, moved they knew not when nor wherefore. She was seated on the side of the bed, her brother in a chair on her left hand, her husband on her right, with his elbow resting on her knee. Saxon was speaking at the moment.

"I have told him," he said, addressing Piedras, "that you are a horse-drover. That you are the owner of two Ranchos, one on the San Antonio, and one, further down the coast, at Corpus Christi. That at each one you have a number of people employed to catch wild horses, which are driven by yourself, and four or five assistants, every fall, to the United States for sale. I told him, too, that the Indians were sometimes very troublesome, and that you greatly needed a bold, determined man, upon whom you could fully rely, to take charge of the rancho at Corpus Christi."

"What did he say?" asked the Mexican.

"He said the place suited him, and he was ready to go, if you could agree on the terms."

"Did he mention the terms he expected?"

"Yes; board, lodging, and thirty dollars a month."

"Cheap enough! I will double it if he pleases me. But what do you know of him?"

"Enough to stake my life upon his doing what he engages to do."

"And I," chimed in Josefa, "I will swear for him on the holy cross."

"Did you mention any other business in which I might happen to be engaged?"

"No. I left that for you."

"Perhaps he might not be so ready to enter into the service, if he knew that a cargo of Africans is sometimes landed at Corpus Christi; that many articles find their way into the country that have never paid duties to the government; that my people catch horses at other places than on the prairie, and generally feed upon cattle branded with a very different mark from mine. I have known many of your countrymen who were ready enough to shed blood, manifest a strange disinclination to more gainful occupations."

"It is not necessary to tell him this, nor any part of it, now. Keep him with you until he becomes attached to you, and then, if he will not engage in your pursuits, at least your secrets will be safe."

"It is risking a great deal," replied the Mexican, musingly, "to take him there without knowing how he relishes such means of making money. I will try it, though, to please Josefa and yourself. At the worst, if he should grow restive, and show signs of betraying me, there are willing hands enough at Corpus to mix some innocent drug with his chocolate, or introduce a *cuchillo* between his ribs while he sleeps."

"Not so, Bartolo," responded his sister. "If any harm comes to him through you, I will myself denounce you to the Political Chief at San Antonio de Bexar."

It is not easy to describe the stare of astonishment with which her brother regarded her. He could not understand the interest so energetically manifested for an acquaintance of less than a month, and it was with difficulty he found breath to reply,

"Why, what is the matter with the woman? Would you have me lose all I have gathered through thirty years of toil and danger, rather than shed a few drops of heretic blood, which the priest would forgive for a single *onza?* You are mad, Josefa, stark mad. Or are you looking out for another

husband, in the expectation that your *marido* here will be taken off?"

"No, I am not mad, and I want no other husband; but I love this youth, and I mean to protect him. There is no danger from his treachery; the only danger is from your suspicions. I know of old that those who once excite them are wonderfully short-lived; and sometimes they die by strange accidents. I remember when a rattlesnake, you would insist upon keeping, unaccountably escaped from its cage, and crawled through two rooms to the bed of poor Antonio Bazan, where it was found the next morning, coiled upon the dead body of its victim. Now if my young friend dies by any such means, your neck will be in very great peril."

Bartolo was satisfied his sister was in earnest, and he felt convinced that she would perform all she had threatened. If he could have done so with safety, the probability is that he would have accommodated her also with a rattlesnake for a bedfellow. As it was, he dared not quarrel with her. To offend her would be to offend her husband, who was sincerely attached to her; and although the Mexican was not a coward, he had no particular desire to feel the horny hand of the settler about his windpipe, which he knew was the very mildest form Saxon's anger would be likely to assume. He paused long enough to let this train of thought run through his mind before he replied,

"Well, Josefa, suppose I refuse to take your friend upon such hard conditions?"

"They are not hard at all; and you will take him, because it is to your interest. He is worth more than all the cowardly *Ladrones* between the Brazos and the Rio Grande."

Saxon had listened to the foregoing colloquy with great composure, feeling confident that his wife would triumph in the end. It had now reached a point at which he thought his interference would help to settle any remaining difficulty.

"You must take him, Bartolo. He will suit you, I am certain. Josefa is right in saying that he is worth all the Mexicans in your employment. But it is getting late now, and we had better go to sleep. We can talk it over in the morning."

Piedras was apparently of the same opinion; for he made no other response than that of bidding his sister and brother-in-law "good night."

In that region, and among that people, it was not usual for the sun to catch a sleeper on his couch. Gray, Saxon, and Piedras had anticipated his rising, and were standing at the back of the enclosure where the horses were fastened. Perhaps their conversation had been upon the merits of the different animals — perhaps upon other matters. At all events, some understanding satisfactory to the parties appeared to have been arrived at; for as they turned towards the house, Saxon remarked,

"You must have a horse, and I know one that will suit you exactly. ' How much money have you?"

"Not much," answered Gray; "how much will the animal you speak of cost?"

"From one hundred and fifty to one hundred and seventy-five dollars. He was brought to this neighborhood two months ago, by a 'mover' from Tennessee. His owner brought nothing to live upon, and must have money in order to get along until his crop is raised. I will ride over and buy his horse. Keep your own money; you can pay me the price when Bartolo comes in with his drove in September."

After breakfast, Gray called upon his friend, John Allison, and informed him of his engagement to superintend the rancho of a horse-drover far down upon the coast.

"It is a wild life," he continued, "and I am glad that you have chosen differently. I should go mad if confined to the dull routine of a counting-house. To you it will bring independence, and probably wealth. I hope to visit you once or

twice a year, unless I fall into some Indian snare, and lose a life I shall not be very careful to preserve. When you write to your father, tell him that the memory of his kindness is among the strongest of the human feelings left in my bosom, and that nothing could be more grateful to the heart-broken exile than a message of kind remembrance from him." The large tears gathered in his eyes as he spoke. He dashed them away with an impatient hand, and sternly exclaimed, "Pshaw! What have I to do with tears, unless it be to wring them from other eyes than my own?"

He then turned the conversation upon the last news from Mexico, and soon afterwards rose to depart. At the inn he found Saxon, and the Mexican, admiring the horse the former had purchased. He was a splendid "four year old," fleet as the wild deer, and strong as a buffalo. His silken mane and glossy iron-gray hide indicated that he was of the purest blood; while the vicious sparkle of his eye, and the impatient champing of the bit, gave notice that it required a strong hand to guide him. An excellent judge of the fine points of a horse, and even at that day one of the best riders in America, Gray surveyed the noble animal with unconcealed admiration.

"You have brought me a treasure, indeed, Mr. Saxon; and if he ever changes owners again, it will be after I am dead."

"There is not such another on this side of the Mississippi," replied the landlord, "and nothing but the prospect of starvation made Burrows sell him."

Gray was fully occupied during the morning in making the necessary preparations for his journey. Towards evening, Josefa called him into her apartment. Carefully closing the doors, she unlocked one of the wooden chests, and took therefrom a leathern jacket, thickly quilted.

"Put this on under your clothes, *mi amigo;* it will stop a Camanche arrow, or a Mexican *cuchillo*, and you are going where you may need some defence against both."

"I thought," said Gray, "that the Mexicans among whom I am going, were to be my friends and companions."

"Watch them, nevertheless. Sleep always with your bowie-knife in your belt, and your rifle in reach. Let no one know that you wear this jacket, or they might be hunting other places than your ribs to inflict a wound. Trust none of them at first. After you have been among them for a while, if you find one that you think can be relied on, take him aside, and ask him to swear upon the cross to be a faithful friend. If he makes any excuse for refusing, set him down as your deadly enemy. If he swears, you may trust him. Put on the jacket. You need not be ashamed of showing your naked breast to me. I want to see how it fits, and show you how to fasten it."

"It fits exactly," continued Josefa, after a careful examination of the defensive armor that now encased his body. "It may not protect you from a bowie-knife, if driven by as strong an arm as your own; but the thin blades of our *Peons* and *Ladrones* will snap like glass against it."

The kind-hearted hostess did not fail to give our hero many other admonitions, whose value he subsequently learned to appreciate.

Settlements in Texas, in 1833, were "few and far between." Every traveller carried a blanket spread over his saddle; a few indispensable articles of clothing rolled in a deer-skin, and tied behind. At the saddle-bow hung a small bag, containing salt and hard bread. On the opposite side was a similar bag of dried, or "jerked," beef, and a large Mexican water-gourd. He made no calculation upon sleeping beneath a roof at night. If he arrived at a Rancho about the usual hour for stopping, he "put up" with its inmates. If not, he travelled on to a running stream, or a water-hole; "staked out" his horse on the prairie; built a fire; cooked his beef, or his venison, by holding it to the blaze on the end of his ramrod; spread his blanket on the grass, and slept with the canopy of heaven for

his covering. Sometimes he was provided with a bag of ground coffee, and a tin cup to boil it; but, generally, water was his only beverage. Of all this Gray was so entirely ignorant that he would have been very poorly equipped, if it had not been for the care and attention of his landlord. Under his superintendence, the accoutrements were perfect, and bestowing a warm embrace upon Josefa, and giving Saxon and John Allison a hearty shake of the hand, Gray turned his face westward, to begin that adventurous career which will long live in the traditions of the border.

CHAPTER V.

"Away, away, my steed and I,
Upon the pinions of the wind,
All human habitations left behind;
We sped like meteors through the sky,
When with its crackling sound the night
Is chequered with the northern light:
Town — village — none were on our track,
But a wide plain of far extent,
And bounded by a forest black."

FOLLOWING a dim pathway over the open prairie, Piedras and his companions journeyed towards Corpus Christi. The distance was accomplished in a space of time which travellers on horseback over the beaten roads of the States would have deemed impracticable. Short as the journey was, however, it had been sufficient to make a most favorable impression of his employer upon the mind of Gray. Bartolo Piedras was no common man. He had been educated in a Convent of the Jesuits. From the priests of that order, who have no equals as teachers, he had acquired a thorough knowledge of the dead languages, of English, and of French. It is fair to presume

that the principles on which he acted were imbibed from the same source. Reduced to penury by the misfortunes of his father, he commenced life with less than fifty dollars in his purse. Recognising no object but that of making money, by fair means, or by foul, he rapidly accumulated a sum that enabled him to purchase a Rancho at Corpus Christi, where he united in his own person the quadruple character of horse-trader, smuggler, slaver, and robber. Few situations could have been better suited to his purposes. Situated at the mouth of the Nueces, near the Laguna del Madre, with a long, narrow island between it and the sea, it was accessible only to vessels of the lightest draught. The obtrusive visits of a cruiser were not to be dreaded at such a spot. No Custom-House officer was to be found within forty or fifty miles. Light schooners could run in, loaded with smuggled goods, in broad daylight, with safety. Sometimes these schooners brought an additional cargo of Africans. Guerero had not then issued his edict of emancipation. Slavery was recognised by the laws of Mexico, and, in point of fact, the edict of Guerero, when it was issued, had no efficacy in Texas. The advantages of Piedras' location by land were equally as great as by sea, and he had so used them, as to become one of the richest men in the northern provinces of Mexico.

In his conversation with Gray, the wily Mexican dropped no hint that could lead to a suspicion that he was engaged in other business than his ostensible one of dealing in horses, and the young American was astonished at the easy courtesy of manner, the varied learning, and extensive information of one who followed a business that, in his own land, was surrendered almost entirely to men without polish or education.

During the first three or four weeks of his sojourn at Corpus Christi, Gray had little to do besides practising with the *lariat*, and picking up such Spanish words as were indispensable in his intercourse with the Rancheros, most of whom

understood no English. At the end of that time, he was informed by Piedras that a party, of which it was proposed he should make one, would set out in a few days on a Mustang hunt. These expeditions generally extended from three to six weeks. Extra horses were packed with all the materials for camping out, and the hunters amply supplied with arms and ammunition, for defence against the roving bands of Indians who infested the prairie. Piedras, in consideration of Gray's inexperience, had mounted him upon a horse of his own, perfectly trained to the business. He rode with them a few miles, and, after giving special instructions to Pedro Gomez, the leader of the party, to communicate all possible information upon the mysteries of horse-catching to his American companion, he took leave of them, and returned to his Rancho, to await the arrival of a smuggling vessel he was expecting off the coast.

In obedience to his instructions, Pedro attached himself to our hero, and devoted the whole of the first day to a minute detail of the various arts to be employed in capturing the wild horses of the Prairie. No doubt his instructions would have proved eminently useful, if Gray had remembered them an hour after they were given. Unfortunately, the mixture of Spanish and English in which they were delivered was almost unintelligible, and, moreover, he was firmly convinced that any knowledge of the subject not derived from actual experience, would prove of little avail. He listened with seeming attention, but if his ear took in the words, they made no impression on his memory. The next day they reached a water-hole in the bed of a dry creek, which in the rainy season was a considerable stream. About three hundred yards from the water-hole there was a log hut, erected on some former occasion for the purpose of storing away such articles as were likely to be injured by exposure to the weather. Here Pedro directed the encampment to be made — the pack-horses un-

loaded, and the provisions and ammunition securely housed. For the hunters themselves, the green earth furnished a couch more luxurious than a bed of down. On the morrow, while the body of the party were busily engaged with preparations for the hunt, Pedro, with a single companion, rode out to reconnoitre. About midday, they returned at half speed, having crossed a Camanche trail, whose freshness indicated that the Indians were in the immediate neighborhood. That the hunting party would be discovered, and attacked during the day, was therefore certain. Gray was astonished at the terror depicted in the countenances of the listeners. Turning calmly to Pedro, he said,

"I have heard that our borderers in the States can form a correct estimate of the number of a body of Indians from the trail; as the Camanches are mounted, I suppose it may be more easily done with them. How many do you suppose there are?"

"Twenty at least," was the reply.

"Twenty naked savages with bows and arrows! Then what have we to fear? We are ten well-armed men, and might safely offer battle to double the number."

The whole party vociferously declaimed against the madness of fighting twenty *Indios bravos;* and Gray speedily became aware that if any fighting was to be done, he must take it all on himself. Pedro, who had manifested none of the trepidation exhibited by his companions, coolly issued orders for the pack-horses to be loaded, and everything got in readiness to retreat at a moment's notice. While the men were engaged in the performance of this welcome duty, he called Gray to his side, and said,

"You and I cannot fight twenty Indians, Senor; and," he continued, while a bitter sneer passed over his hard, thin features, "you see we must fight alone, or retreat with the rest."

"I am not sure of that," was the reply. "Two bold men

in that log house ought to be a match for more than twenty Camanches."

"Possibly so; but what is to become of the horses? And, even if we succeeded in driving them off, how are we to remove all this property for which I am responsible to Senor Piedras? No, Senor, we cannot fight, but we can make a show of fighting, and give the pack-horses time to get beyond danger of capture."

His plan was already matured. It was, to remain stationary until the Camanches came in sight, in order not to fall upon them unexpectedly on the prairie. A force of six or seven men was then to show itself in the edge of the timber, while the pack-horses were driven off under cover of the trees. When a sufficient distance was attained, they were to make, with all speed, by a circuitous route, for the rancho at Corpus Christi.

"If we show a bold front," he said, "they will waste some hours, and probably the whole day, in trying to ascertain our exact strength, before they venture to attack us in the timber. At night, it will be easy to make good our own retreat."

Gray was compelled to acquiesce in a plan that savored more of cowardice than of prudence; but he inwardly resolved that if any venturous Camanche came within range of his rifle, there should be mourning among the tribe.

The Indians did not keep them in suspense. The work of reloading the pack-horses had been concluded but a few minutes, when they appeared in sight, following the trail made by Pedro and his men the preceding day. Under cover of the timber, the pack-horses were moved off as before agreed upon, while Pedro, with the remainder of the party, took up a position in the bushes in front of the Camanches. His dispositions were skilfully made; so much so, that it was impossible for the enemy to tell what his real strength might be. The number of pack-horses added to their uncertainty. In follow-

ing the trail, they had ascertained how many horses had passed over it; and from the unusual boldness exhibited by the Mexicans, they concluded that every horse must have carried a rider. They had approached the water-hole in the confident belief that no resistance would be offered, and that the only trouble they would have to encounter would be in running down and catching the fugitives. From an occasional glimpse of an armed man in the chapparal, they were apprised that their appearance had been anticipated, and the Rancheros were prepared to give them battle. The south-western Indians have at all times a strong repugnance to attack an enemy under cover. Bands of forty or fifty have often been known to pass a Rancho unmolested, which was defended by only two or three Americans. That repugnance was increased on the present occasion, by a knowledge of the usual cowardice of the Mexicans, and the natural supposition that they must be in considerable force, or they would not have awaited the attack. Under this impression, they halted at about the distance of two hundred yards, to reconnoitre. Gray had taken his position on one of the flanks. A warrior, who appeared to be a chief, galloped in the direction of the place where he was concealed. He had come within fair rifle range, when he halted, shaded his eyes with his hand, and peered eagerly into the chapparal bushes. Resting his gun by the side of the tree, behind which he was concealed, and taking deliberate aim, Gray fired. The hand of the warrior fell from his eyes, and grasped the mane. The horse at the same time wheeled and darted off towards the main body. By a half convulsive motion, the other hand was also brought up and clutched in the long mane. It was in vain. A few bounds were sufficient to shake the Savage from his seat. Yet so tenacious was his death-grasp, he was dragged many yards before the steed was freed from his lifeless rider. The sharp crack of the rifle spread more terror among the Indians than the fall of their chief. It was a sound that had

never boded them any good, and the cry of "Americans" passed from one to the other. A hasty retreat was the consequence. Finding themselves unpursued, they halted upon a little knoll not far off, and held another council of war. Their plan of operations having been resolved upon, they spread themselves out abreast in a long line upon the prairie, and galloping up near enough to discharge a volley of arrows into the bushes, wheeled, and rode back. This manœuvre was repeated several times. Pedro, who knew that their object was to draw his fire, and then convert the feigned attack into a real one, issued strict orders that not a trigger should be touched. Gray had thus far obeyed him simply because no opportunity for a fair shot had offered. Once more the Indians came on, discharging their arrows as usual. A warrior more venturesome than the rest, halted, after wheeling his steed, to excite his enemies by insulting gestures. It was a fatal bravado. The echoes of the rifle sounded over the prairie, and the bold savage tumbled to the ground a lifeless corpse. Apparently disheartened by the loss of two of their "braves," the Indians retreated behind the knoll where their council of war had been held.

"They are gone," said Pedro, "and will not trouble us again. When the sun goes down, we must overtake the pack-horses, and turn them back."

Each individual Mexican was now a hero, in his own estimation, for having so long faced the dreaded warriors of the desert — and loud vauntings were heard on every side as to what they would have accomplished, if Pedro had only let them fire. A slight smile wrinkled the features of the stern old man, but he took no other notice of the jabbering group about him. He was reflecting upon the possibility of overtaking the party with the pack-horses. Supposing all danger from the Indians at an end, as, from their known habits, it was very improbable they would remain in a neighborhood

where they had met with a repulse, he was solicitous to turn the retreating party back, and carry out the objects of the expedition. Accordingly, when the shadows of the evening came down, he left the shelter of the friendly timber, and struck out in an eastern direction across the open prairie. Riding in double file, the march was commenced in perfect silence. They had not advanced more than a mile, when a wild cry behind apprised them that the savages were between them and the woods. At the same time, by the clear moonlight, they observed another body filing out from a *mott* in front. Hemmed in both in front and rear, the frightened Mexicans abandoned all idea of resistance; and, scattering to the right and left, fled with disgraceful speed, leaving Gray and Pedro to take care of themselves.

"Fools!" muttered the latter, "they will be taken and scalped to a man. There is one chance for you and me, Señor, and that is, to break through yonder line, and regain the timber we ought not to have quitted without a more careful reconnoissance

"That is easy enough," was the reply. "They are scattering in pursuit of the fugitives, and we shall not have more than five or six to oppose us."

"And that is greater odds than I would willingly encounter on the plains. Not that I have any great fears of death, or any very strong ties to bind me to life; but I have objections to quitting this world at the pleasure of an enemy, and shall fight as hard to save the few drops in these withered veins as you will for the flood that courses through yours. They are moving towards us: we must meet them at full speed. My advice is to shoot at their horses."

The main body of the Indians had followed in pursuit of the flying Mexicans. Six only remained, who were leisurely approaching Pedro and Gray, making signs for them to surrender.

"Now is our time," said Pedro, "but, before we charge, I have a few more words to say. You may escape, and I may be killed in the effort; or, if we both succeed in reaching the timber, we may be separated so as not to find each other again; Corpus Christi is twenty-five leagues exactly north-east of us. You will, therefore, know in what direction to travel, if you find yourself without a guide in the morning. Now charge."

The cool and courageous bearing of this withered old man contrasted strangely with the cowardly demeanor of his countrymen. Gray marked it, and resolved, if they escaped that danger, to make Pedro his friend. There was no time now for comment. Driving the rowels of their spurs deep into the horses' sides, they rushed with headlong speed directly upon the advancing foemen. Sudden and unexpected as was the attack, the savages were not wholly taken by surprise. They separated quickly, so as to avoid a direct hand-to-hand encounter, and secure all the advantages to be derived from a flank discharge of their bows and arrows. In their extreme haste, the volley was badly aimed, and whistled harmlessly through the air. At the distance of ten paces, Pedro discharged his *escopeta*, which took effect in the neck of one of the horses, and made the animal dash off across the prairie, in defiance of every effort of his rider. Gray did not fire, but pressed on for the timber. For three-fourths of a mile, the contest was altogether one of speed. A party of Camanches, hearing the report of Pedro's *escopeta*, desisted from the pursuit of the Rancheros, and endeavored to intercept Gray and his companion before they could reach the wood. It was soon evident, however, that this movement would be unavailing, and the Indians once more resorted to their bows. An arrow whistled harmlessly by Pedro's head. Another struck Gray between the shoulders, where it was stopped by the quilted jacket Josefa had given him. Another, with more fatal effect, was buried deep in his horse's flank. He felt the animal reel, and knew that in a few

more bounds he must fall. Believing that it would be dangerous to remain longer upon his back, he sprung to his feet, and prepared to defend himself with the desperation of despair. An exulting shout from the dusky warriors hailed this decided success, and, believing his death or capture now to be certain, they swept by in pursuit of Pedro, leaving our hero to be dealt with by their comrades, who were approaching from the flank. A lightning glance around enabled Gray to take in all the advantages and disadvantages of his situation. By making a sharp angle towards a point of timber which jutted out into the prairie, he threw his pursuers far into the rear, and bounded off with the speed of the greyhound for the friendly covert. He could distinctly hear the panting of the foremost horse as he reached the wood, and, just as he availed himself of the shelter of a tree, a volley of arrows pattered against it. Promptly his rifle was raised to return the compliment. The Indians, as usual, had thrown themselves along the sides of their horses, exposing nothing but a leg and arm to his aim. This, however, was enough for a practised marksman like Gray; the sharp report of the gun was followed by the fall of a warrior, whose leg was shattered at the knee. Gray waited to see no more: with rapid strides he plunged deeper into the shadows of the dark wood, and was soon safe from the danger of pursuit.

What followed can best be related in the language employed by himself, long afterwards, when recounting the incidents of his "first Indian fight" to a group of earnest listeners around a camp-fire on the Rio Grande. Years passed upon the frontier had done their work; the polish of his manner could not, indeed, be all destroyed, and his voice was still sweet and musical, as in his earlier days; but, from long association, his conversation, except upon rare occasions, was in the dialect of the border.

"I felt safe enough for that night," he said, "when I had

once got into the shade of the trees; but then I was on foot, seventy-five or eighty miles from Corpus Christi, in a country of which I knew nothing, except that water was uncommonly scarce, and a fellow had a fair chance to get very thirsty before he found any. Besides, I knew nothing of the Camanches, or their habits, and could not tell how long they might take it into their heads to remain in the neighborhood. I kept striking deeper into the woods until about midnight, when I sat down at the root of a tree, and slept soundly for five or six hours. My rifle was resting across my lap, and just after daybreak a rustling in the *chaparal* made me bounce to my feet, gun in hand. About thirty yards off I saw a large bull, that had probably been *stampeded* some time before, and remained in the woods until he was wild as a deer. This was a godsend, provided I could kill him; but there lay the diphthong. If I shot him in the head, the ball would almost certainly glance, and my gentleman would either make off through the bushes, or come plunging headforemost at me. So, if I shot him in the side I might kill him, but he would have strength enough left to kill me, or at least to get beyond my reach, before he fell. While I was making these calculations, the bull was moving slowly towards me without the least notion of my presence and friendly intentions. He had reached an open space, and turned his head aside to brush away a fly, when I let drive at the knee-joint. I have seen many things badly astonished since that time, and some before; but that bull was worse thunderstruck than anything I ever met. At the crack of the gun he fell forward, digging his nose into the ground. He scuffled up in a hurry, only to catch a worse fall. By this time, he had found out to whom he owed the favor of a broken leg, and was trying his d—n–dst to establish a more intimate acquaintance than I had any desire to cultivate. I ran off a few steps, reloaded my gun, and administered a blue pill through the right eye. He fell dead enough, as I thought;

but it turned out that he had no notion of the sort. He was on his three pegs again before I could get half-way to him. You all know, boys, that I am not much of a coward; but at that moment I acknowledge to a little more uneasiness than I would care to exhibit in the presence of a Mexican army. The fact is, that bull was a fearful object to look upon; and I made it convenient to put considerable more ground between us as quick as possible. One eye was bursted from the socket; the blood ran in a large stream down his face, into his nostrils; his hair was all turned the wrong way, and his tail was furiously lashing his sides, as, with a roar of pain and rage, he made another rush towards me. It took two more bullets to settle him; and even after he was dead to a certainty, I had been so much startled that I walked around him full three minutes before venturing up to cut his throat. There was no time lost in skinning him; after which, I cut off enough of the carcase to last me for several days, wrapped it in the hide, and, throwing it on my shoulder, made for the water-hole where Pedro had pitched our camp the day previous. I thought the Camanches were like enough to be prowling around 'them diggins;' but I had not tasted water for more than twenty hours; and when a man is thirsty, no matter whether it is for liquor or water, he will risk a great deal to get it. As luck would have it, they were no where to be seen; nor could I discover any fresh 'signs' about the water-hole. It was tolerably certain, therefore, that they had gone off with the scalps of the Rancheros, whom I had no doubt they had overtaken. With a mind as much at ease as the novelty of my situation would permit, I built a fire, roasted about a yard of bull beef, and swallowed it half raw. After that I began to arrange my plans. The first thing was to cut the hide into strips and twist them into a *lariat*. This was finished by dark. Another yard of beef went the way of its predecessor. The quantity I had consumed made me sleepy,

and I climbed into a tree to avoid the wolves, which the scent of fresh meat would be almost sure to attract to the place. In the morning, I fastened one end of the *lariat* securely to a strong limb, and waited patiently for the wild horses to pass me on their way to water. Sure enough, before long I observed a large drove approaching. One after another passed below me, but I was determined to have a good one. At length a noble stallion trotted slowly under the tree. Now was my time. Instantly the *lariat* was cast over his head, and drawn tight around his neck. With a terrified snort, he jumped off to the end of the *lariat*, when he was thrown back on his haunches with a force that I was afraid would unjoint his neck. Several times his efforts to get away met with the same success. At last I lit from the tree, and, after all sorts of trouble, managed to tie my shirt over his eyes. Stroking him gently upon the neck, I concluded to spring upon him and try how he 'd *perform* before undoing the fastenings. According to a neat calculation, made at the time, it took him just three seconds to repudiate the load. I tried it again. The fact is, I was bound to have a horse; and if forty devils had been collected in his carcase, it is my opinion that I should have driven them all out in the end. This time I was pitched head-foremost quicker than before; but I gained a large amount of useful knowledge. I saw it was not the horse that threw me; it was the raw hide rope. When he jumped one way, and the rope jerked him another, I was obliged to take a *skoot* between the two forces. Observing this, I quickly climbed up the tree, dropped astraddle of him, and away we went. By striking him on one side or the other, as occasion required, I kept his head pretty well on a north-east course; and as long as this was the case, the rate at which he was travelling was an accommodation rather than otherwise. After some hours, he began to flag. I tried to get up a sort of conversation with him. At the first sound of my voice, he let out a new link,

and scampered off at a lick that reduced miles of open prairie to very short measure. The devil himself, however, cannot run always, and by nightfall he was gentle enough. The clouds had been gathering overhead during the evening, and when dark came, neither moon nor stars were to be seen. I had to guess at the course, and, somehow, I never could keep on in one direction more than half an hour without thinking I must be wrong. In this way, I kept 'pirooting round' until after midnight, when I got a glimpse of the north star, and found I was steering south-east instead of north-east. I had no trouble to manage my horse now, and, turning his head in the right direction, we jogged on until we made our entrance into Corpus Christi, about twelve o'clock the next day. The water about Corpus is not the sweetest, as some of you happen to know; but that day I would have sworn it was honey-dew before any magistrate in the States, or any priest in Mexico. Since that day I have acquired a weakness for *muscal;* and, though I *can* drink water when nothing else is to be had, I can't say I am fond of the taste. Still, every time I think of that first drink, I would be willing to take another dare-devil ride for the pleasure it gave."

"What became of the horse?" asked one of the group.

"He lived, and that was about all. He was broken-winded, and never worth anything afterwards, though I kept him for years, on account of the good he had done."

Such was the story as related by Gray himself. From this adventure he obtained the *soubriquet* of "Mustang,"—a name by which he afterwards became so generally known, that many of his acquaintances doubted if he ever had another.

The pack-horses had returned in safety; so had Pedro and two of the Rancheros who fled at the first appearance of the Indians on the prairie. The fate of the others was easily divined. The loss appeared to affect Bartolo Piedras greatly. No one had ever seen him so troubled under much heavier

misfortunes. Even the rich cargo, then landing on the beach, failed to restore his good humor. The fact is, he was not certain in what light his sister would view the disappearance of Gray. He knew himself innocent in this instance; but it is the curse of former misdeeds, that they lead others to suspect us when our intentions are most upright. He felt that his position was exceedingly insecure, and lost all self-command in the vexatious fears that oppressed him. It was with unfeigned gladness that he welcomed Gray's return, and no insincere solicitude that he inquired into his wants, and attended to their being supplied.

When the first cravings of hunger and thirst were appeased, Gray stretched himself upon a couch, and slept deeply for many hours. The sun was shining in at the open door when he awakened the next day, sore, bruised, and feverish. By Bartolo's orders, a pitcher of generous wine had been placed by his side. For the first time in his life he drank deeply of the intoxicating bowl, and again sought the arms of Morpheus. He was discussing, with a ravenous appetite, the plentiful supper brought to him, when Bartolo entered his apartment. Dismissing the attendant, and closing the door, he said, seriously,

"I have something to communicate to you, Señor Gray, that I would rather you should hear to-night, if you are sufficiently rested."

"You could not have chosen a better time," was the reply. "I have slept enough to last a week, I think, and will gladly have your company as long as you are willing to remain."

"I am happy in having chosen an occasion so agreeable. When I made an arrangement with you," he continued, "to take charge of this Rancho, there were some things connected with your duties here that I did not feel free to communicate. I wished you to see something more of the life you were to lead, and of me. I wished also to study your character and

qualities, in a less partial light than that afforded by the friendly representations of my brother-in-law. The time has come when that communication cannot be delayed. To-morrow your own eyes will tell you that I am a smuggler, as well as horse-drover. You see I do not mince words, and I beg you not to interrupt me. You can have no partiality for my government. To your people, it is not at this time friendly. It never was sincerely so. Santa Anna cannot but know that he must make his peace with the Church, and declare for centralism, or his power is gone. If he does this, the Americans in Texas will revolt. Every dollar he collects from the customs will be used in subjugating them; so that, in point of fact, I am fighting your battles in transferring a portion of his revenues to my pockets. If you are willing to engage in this work, a part of the profits, commensurate with your services, shall be assigned to you. If you are not, you are free to depart, only giving me your word not to betray the secret I have confided to you."

Gray's feelings, during this address, were of a character he could not himself define. One ample hand was passed upon his forehead, as usual with him in cases of strong emotion, while the other unconsciously played with the handle of his bowie-knife. At length, he spoke:

"I will think on what you have said, Señor; and to-morrow you shall have my answer. Of one thing you may be assured, in no case need you fear betrayal by me."

"To-morrow let it be. Is this wine to your taste? It has never been subjected to Custom-House adulterations, and ought to be excellent."

"I am a poor judge; though to me it seems delicious."

"We will have a fresh supply, and I will remain an hour or so to drive away the weariness of your sick couch. Like the most of my race, I am habitually temperate; yet there is something in good wine which banishes care, and often drives

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away unpleasant reflection upon things we may wish forgotten."

"Does it indeed do this? Then I am in danger of becoming a great toper."

"I should have thought you were too young to have suffered much, and it is only the memory of sufferings we wish to destroy."

"Agony is not measured by years."

"True. But let us change the theme. Fill your glass, and tell me of your adventure with the Camanches. I, in my turn, will relate some 'moving incidents by flood and field,' with which a life of wandering and danger have made me familiar."

Gray, who had made his own story as short as possible, listened with close attention to those of his companion. The selection of his subjects proved that Bartolo Piedras had already obtained a deep insight into the character of our hero; the ease and fluency of his discourse gave to them additional charms; and when he rose to depart, although he left an impression that he was a bad and dangerous man, he left also the conviction that a life of daring adventure could not be commenced under the auspices of a more competent teacher.

He was gone; and Gray, from whose eyelids sleep had fled, walked up and down, muttering to himself,

"A smuggler from patriotism. By the living God, I should never have been able to give it so respectable a gloss. I suppose I shall next be asked to commit a few highway robberies from the same commendable motives. Well, no matter. It holds out the prospect of what I seek, and an outlawed murderer ought not to be very particular in the selection of his calling."

How rapidly the evil one works! One year before, if a man had coupled the name of Mabry Gray with that of smuggler, he would have been stricken to the earth on the instant.

Now, he was calculating upon the possibility of meriting the additional appellation of highway robber, forgetful that to reason at all upon such a subject, is to be half-way lost. Yet, who has not reasoned of things he would shudder to reveal? Who, in his darker hours, has not contemplated the commission of crimes for which the death penalty is the only atonement? If there be any such, let him kneel in his closet, and thank God, not that he is better than others, but that he has been less severely tried.

CHAPTER VI.

"Impelled, with steps unceasing, to pursue
Some fleeting good, that mocks me with the view;
That, like the circle-bounding earth and skies,
Allures from far, yet, as I follow, flies;
My fortune leads to traverse realms alone,
And find no spot of all the world my own."

A LITTLE schooner was riding at anchor off the beach at Corpus Christi. Early as the hour was, boats were busily plying between the vessel and the land. On that lone shore no apprehensions of unwelcome visitors were entertained; and the work of unloading the vessel was carried on as openly as if her papers had passed regularly through the hands of the government officials. Gray had risen from his couch none the worse for his late ride, except in the matter of bruises and scratches, that very slightly impaired his vigor. Walking leisurely to the beach, he approached Piedras, and announced his presence by saying,

"You seem to have little fear of the laws, Señor, in your dealings with the smugglers. In other countries, that cargo would have been landed and stored away under the friendly cover of the night."

"I have nothing to fear here," replied Piedras, after a courteous greeting. "My chief risk lies in getting these goods safely into the country. It is in that service I so much need your aid. At breakfast we can talk farther; there are more persons on this beach than it is needful to make acquainted with any arrangement between us."

Gray turned away, and left Piedras to continue his inventory of the packages as they were landed. At the gate of the Rancho he found Pedro Gomez doing duty as a sentry. Remembering the advice of Josefa, he seated himself upon a bench, inviting the old man to take a seat by his side.

"I will stand guard, also, Pedro, until the vessel is unloaded. In the meantime, I wish to have some conversation with you."

"What can the Señor Gray want with a worn-out old man like me?"

"I want you to be my friend, Pedro, as I shall be yours. I value courage much higher than strength, and I have seen you firm as a rock where brave men might not have been ashamed to acknowledge some trepidation. Nor are you worn out, as you say. You are tough and wiry, and age seems to have hardened instead of weakening your limbs. Will you be my friend?"

"It has been long, Señor, since any man asked that question of Pedro Gomez. Once I was rich, and friends then were abundant. When the hand of power was laid heavily upon me, they who had fattened on my bounty sought to betray me to the oppressor. Since that time, I have had little faith in friendships."

"Ah! you have been a sufferer by the false-hearted and the treacherous; then there is a stronger link between us than I supposed. I, too, have been stung deeply. There is," he continued, "another reason for unity between us. You are not loved by the yellow-skinned inmates of this agreeable

Rancho; if I am not hated now, I will be very shortly. Let us then, I say again, be friends."

"Why do you stay here, Señor, if you dread the enmity of the Rancheros?"

"Dread it! I know no human danger great enough to excite a feeling of fear in my bosom. On the contrary, it is the consciousness that I am surrounded by dangers that keeps me here. There is something in my nature that revels in baffling the malice of enemies. Do you remember when you told me that you would fight to the last, not so much because you objected to dying, as because you did not choose to leave the world at the bidding of an enemy? Now that was a feeling I could understand. It touched a chord which found an answer in my own bosom; and from that moment I resolved to make you my friend, if chance should rescue us from the strait in which we then were."

The old man had thus far preserved with difficulty a tone of cold indifference. In their brief intercourse, Gray had succeeded in rousing a feeling in his breast, that had been a stranger there for years. For the manly bearing, the dauntless courage of the white man, he felt that degree of admiration such qualities generally excite in kindred natures — no more. It was the low, sweet voice, the gentle demeanor, the beaming countenance, beautiful as that of a woman, which won its way directly to the heart of the Mexican. He had resisted its impulses, because long intercourse with a treacherous race had made suspicion a virtue. That suspicion was now thrown from him with one of those sudden impulses common among the children of the sun, and with sparkling eye he exclaimed,

"By St. Iago, Señor, you shall have your wish. From this day forth, count Pedro Gomez a friend who will stand by you in sickness or in health, in peril or in safety, in chains or on the free prairie."

"And if I fail you, Pedro, in the hour of trial, I give you

free permission to bury a dagger in my heart. There was," he continued, "a woman of your race who bade me trust to no Mexican's faith who did not swear it upon the holy cross; but it would be an insult to a brave man like you, to ask for such a test. I am satisfied with your word."

"She was right, Señor; without that, ninety in a hundred would betray you upon the first temptation, and probably stab you to avoid the consequences of their treachery. I thank you a thousand times for having a better opinion of me. Nevertheless," he added, producing a cross from his bosom, "it may save you at some time from indulging unpleasant suspicions if I too should swear; and, to avoid any appearance of inequality, you shall do the same."

A mutual oath was taken, and the sacred symbol pressed to the lips of each alternately.

"Now, go, Señor. There will be no prudence in publishing our compact. Hereafter, when we meet alone, it must be without seeming to desire it."

Gray turned into the Rancho, where he awaited the coming of Piedras. He had resolved to accept the offer made to him on the previous night. The long journeys, the constant watchfulness, and the sometimes bloody encounters, that necessarily chequered such a life, had all of them charms to soothe his discontent, and win him from painful reflections on the past.

At breakfast, while the attendants were in hearing, Bartolo confined his discourse to subjects of general interest. After the dishes were removed, he turned upon Gray a countenance of seeming unconcern, and remarked,

"Well, Señor. You have thought of my proposition, and I hope determined to accept it."

"I have thought of it, and it so far pleases me, that I think you may consider it accepted. Before I engage myself irrevocably, however, there are one or two points I would like to understand. You said, this morning, the danger you appre-

hended was from the land. Does that danger arise from the interference of my countrymen?"

"Your countrymen!" repeated Bartolo Piedras. "Ah, it is easy to see that you are a stranger in Texas. I supply your countrymen with brandy, wine, domestic calico, or whatever else they need. They do not *know* that I am a smuggler, nor *will* they know it. If any one should be foolish enough to volunteer the information, his utterance would most probably be stopped by a mouthful of loose teeth. They get from me many articles that could not otherwise be procured at rates within the compass of their means. Even their powder and lead are procured from me, or my agents. You may imagine, therefore, that, if they interfered at all, it would be to protect, rather than embarrass me. The service I propose for you, is much more profitable, as well as a much more hazardous one. I desire you to take charge of the rich laces, silk, and linen, intended for the market at Monterey. The packages, though of great value, are of little bulk. Your party must be small. From here to the Rio Grande, there is danger from the Indians. Beyond that, at every village, police patrols or bands of irregular soldiers are to be avoided, deceived, or resisted. In short, every step of the way requires the exercise of skill, prudence, and daring. Do you feel willing to undertake the charge?"

"Cheerfully, if one difficulty can be removed?"

"Pray what is that?"

"I am entirely ignorant of the country, and not much better acquainted with the language."

"That Pedro Gomez will supply. He goes with you, and four of the boldest of my peons."

All the necessary details having been satisfactorily settled, Gray proceeded to the store-house where the Mexicans were busily engaged arranging and packing the goods for their different markets. In this drudgery he cheerfully partici-

pated. He was not one to engage in any pursuit without making himself acquainted with all that was necessary to success. Of his own free-will he had entered upon a smuggler's career, — and all the minutiæ of the smuggler's art might be important. He marked the manner of compressing the greatest amount in the smallest space, and noticed particularly those packages containing the most costly articles, so that, if any portion had to be abandoned, he would lose no time in making the selection. Throughout that day and the next, the work was continued. At nightfall, Gray and Pedro were called into the apartment of Bartolo Piedras, to receive his last instructions. In another hour, their horses' heads were turned towards the south-west, and the little troop took up its march across the blooming prairie. A moonlight ride on the vast solitudes of the south-west is a thing to be remembered after the hairs have turned silver-white, and the blood has grown thin and old. The thick gloom of the forest gathers shapes of fear in every rustling bush. The roar of the waves on the trackless sea fills the mind with apprehension. On the wide prairie, no covert hides a lurking foe — no insatiate waters are sighing for their human victims. The footstep of the traveller rests upon the solid earth, and crushed flowers pour odors along his path. Yet a deeper awe creeps upon him in the silence of the night, and reason in vain assures him that here he is safe. He feels as if he had invaded a kingdom sacred to sweetness and beauty, and the doom of sacrilege comes floating before his mental vision. The warrior of the middle ages, who had breasted the dangers of many a stricken field with savage delight, fled in wild terror from a headless staff, to which was affixed a box containing the ashes of some now-forgotten saint. So the lovely flowers, the bright green grass, and the balmy breezes of the prairie, are armed with imaginary terrors, which appal the boldest at first, and impress upon the memory sensations that are never entirely obliterated. No

sound of insect, bird, or beast, is heard. Earth and air are voiceless. Stillness is brooding there, so deep and so intense that the very moonbeams seem to be asleep, and forget to caress the flowers that have wooed them from the skies. To Mabry Gray the war of battle would have been harmonious melody, and the crouching panther welcomed with delight. In the fierce game where life is the stake, the instinct of Nature directs all the faculties to a given point, and sorrow forgets to gnaw at the heart-strings while the struggle endures. But the total absence of any physical danger — the quiet night — the stirless repose of all "above, about, around," while it filled his mind with indescribable awe, waked also the dreams of sadness and remorse, to kindle their slow fires within his tortured breast. In vain he struggled against the depressing sensation — in vain, with closed teeth and clenched hand, he sought to drive the nightmare from his soul. In spite of himself, he was carried back to the period when he sported in childhood by the banks of the Cape Fear. The music of his mother's voice was floating around him, as he once loved to hear it, when, kneeling by her side, he listened to the outpouring of her soul in prayer for her gentle and beautiful child. But the remembrance brought no gladness in its train. It only served to remind him how deep was his fall — how utter was his wretchedness. In the bitterness of his reflections, he drove the spurs unconsciously deep into his horse's flanks. The fiery animal bounded madly forward when he felt the unaccustomed goad. It required all Gray's skill to keep the saddle, and all his strength to restrain the fierce curvetings of the infuriated steed. The struggle restored him to himself, and, dropping back by the side of Pedro, he resolved to prevent a recurrence of like feelings by continued conversation with his Mexican friend.

"This wilderness of grass and flowers is strangely beautiful

by moonlight, Pedro. I wonder that it never so impressed me before."

"If I remember rightly, Señor, you have never been upon the prairie but once by moonlight, and then the Camanches furnished us with other studies than the beauties of scenery."

"True, but I have ridden over it from San Felipe to Corpus Christi, camping out by the way."

"Yes, camping in a timber mott, with a blazing fire before you. It is not in that way, Señor, that you can learn the mysteries of the plains. You have taken your first lesson to-night. None hereafter will equal its vividness. In time it will grow so familiar, that you will cross it, as I do, with indifference. Once it stirred my blood as it has done yours within the hour. The next time, half its depressing awe, and all its enchantments, were gone; very soon I came to regard it as only a pretty meadow, affording an excellent range for the wild herds that people it."

"You think such will be my case."

"Undoubtedly. It is the common history of all who roam over these solitudes."

"I hope you may be right, for I love not the companionship of such thoughts as have forced themselves upon me to-night."

They rode on in silence for awhile, and when Pedro again spoke, his thoughts had reverted to the business in which they were engaged.

"It will be well for you, Señor, to mark every cluster of prickly pears, and every timber mott on the route. At first they will all look to you exactly alike; but you will soon perceive that they are as different as the features of the human face, and as easily recognized. The general course to Monterey is south-west. It is often necessary, however, to vary from it, either on account of the scarcity of water, or to avoid some anticipated danger. A knowledge of the bearing of every prominent object then becomes important, for I assure

you, it is quite as easy to get lost on these wide plains, as in the thickest forest. I will point out the different turnings to you, as we reach them, so that if we should be separated, you will have less difficulty in finding your way back to the Rancho."

In such conversation the night wore away, and soon after day-break, the little party fastened their horses in the cover of a mott, and laid down to sleep until the friendly night brought its shadows to conceal their lawless journey.

"I thought," said Gray, when they were again mounted, "that we had nothing to fear, except from the Camanches, on this side of the Rio Grande, and I should suppose they were less likely to interrupt our march during the day than the night."

"You are wrong, Señor. The Camanches will ride, and fight at night, when it is needful; but it is not their general custom. Moreover at this time the Mexican authorities are constantly moving small parties of troops into Texas, and we are more likely to encounter them than the Indians."

"Where do you propose to cross the Rio Grande?"

"Between Reynosa and Camargo. It is the safest point, and not attended with much greater hardships."

Five or six miles from the Rio Grande, where a dense *Chaparal* thicket afforded an excellent shelter, it was judged expedient by Pedro, that the party should be halted, while one of the number went forward to reconnoitre, and report if any obstacle opposed their progress.

On the northern bank of the river, about half way between Reynosa and Camargo, there was a miserable collection of huts, all of which, except one, had been abandoned by their former proprietors. The family who remained, were in the employment of Piedras, who supplied them with the means of living without other labor than that of cultivating a small melon-patch, and two or three acres of Indian-corn. The head of

the family, Pepe Benito, was of the lowest extraction. He had trod all the mazes of crime from pilfering up to murder, and so little of humanity existed in his composition, that it is doubtful if he ever felt a twinge of conscience for the blackest of his misdeeds. For his employer he had a sort of compound attachment — a mixture of fear, and of brutish gratitude. Fear of the lash, and gratitude for the bones that were tossed to him. In his service he would cheerfully brave danger, and encounter fatigue, that he would not have undergone to save his own family from starvation. Unlettered as he was, he was gifted with extraordinary cunning and caution. These faculties were sharpened by constant exercise, in eluding the penalties to which his evil propensities continually made him liable. In the hands of a man like Piedras he was an invaluable instrument, and the politic Ranchero had therefore lost no opportunity of impressing him with an exalted idea of his munificence, together with a wholesome fear of his power. His business was to keep an eye on the opposite bank of the river — to pay occasional visits to Camargo and Reynosa, and pick up all possible information of the movements of troops or police parties from either point.

To the hut of this worthy the spy sent out by Pedro directed his steps. The night had considerably advanced when he returned, bringing Pepe Benito along with him. From the excited gestures of the party, more than from his imperfect knowledge of their language, Gray learned that some unexpected obstacle was before them. In answer to his inquiries, Pedro explained that a party of Lanceros were encamped on the southern bank of the Rio Grande. They had been there for two days; and Pepe, who had crossed the river under the pretence of selling melons, had failed, with all his cunning, in obtaining the slightest clue to their objects.

"None of our people," continued Pedro, "could have betrayed us; for none of them had left the Rancho at Corpus

Christi, and none of them could conjecture where I would cross the Rio Grande. Pepe would betray his God sooner than Bartolo Piedras; yet, unless they are waiting for us, I can conceive no possible reason for an encampment in so unusual a place. I will ride over myself, and survey the ground."

The horses were saddled, and, issuing strict orders that no one should leave the shelter of the thicket upon any pretence whatever until his return, Pedro, accompanied by Gray and Pepe, rode at a gallop for the river. The family of Pepe were buried in profound slumber when they arrived, and the numerous dogs which infest every Mexican dwelling were soon quieted by the sound of their master's voice. Securing the horses in one of the deserted huts, the little party approached the bank of the stream. It was past midnight, but several camp-fires were burning on the opposite side, and a bright light illuminated the canvass walls of the only tent that had been pitched. There was no doubt that this was occupied by the commander of the party, and that some unusual cause had prevented him from seeking repose at an earlier hour. They had not waited long before two persons emerged from the tent and walked towards the river. Pepe and his companions now descended, by a rude footway, to the water's edge. Watching the opposite bank intently, the quick eye of the Mexican detected a moving object among the lines of light cast by the camp-fires on the river. Not doubting that it was a boat, he drew his companions back deep into the shadow of the overhanging bluff, to watch unobserved its approach. Soon the bow of a clumsy skiff grated on the sand. A light form leaped ashore, and fastened it securely by a raw hide thong. In another moment the hand of Pepe was on his throat, and he was dragged, more dead than alive, up the bank. Pulling him along to the hut most sheltered from view, a light was struck, and the countenance of the night-wanderer exposed.

"*Carajo!*" hissed Pepe through his closed teeth; "my own son a traitor!"

One who has never heard this oath from the lips of a Mexican can have no conception of the deep, concentrated, deadly passion it expresses. The "God damn" of the Englishman, and the "sacre" of the Frenchman, are impressive enough; but the "*carajo*" of the Mexican has a fierce intensity to which the combined perfection of French and English swearing is a stranger. It is not uttered by the lips; it comes from the chest, like the low growl of the tiger crouching for his spring, and impresses the hearer not so much with the idea of anger, as of bloody and implacable hate.

The hand of Pepe was removed from the windpipe of his son, and he stood regarding the trembling boy, who had not seen more than sixteen summers, with a countenance in whose pitiless lineaments not a hope of mercy could be traced.

"What were you doing among the Lanceros?" he sternly demanded.

"Selling melons," was the ready lie.

"Selling melons at midnight. Fool! do you expect to impose upon me by such a tale?"

By dint of long questioning, the truth was finally extracted from him. The Alcalde at Camargo had received information of Piedras's smuggling operations from a Peon formerly in his employment, and accordingly dispatched small parties of horse to each of the usual crossing-places about the time he expected the arrival of the smuggled goods. The commander of the troops at this point, deeming it hopeless to make any attempt upon Pedro, had addressed himself to the cupidity of his son. For an insignificant bribe, the boy agreed to give him notice of the approach of any party of smugglers, and to furnish him with such information of the time and place of crossing as would enable him to capture the whole. Accordingly, when Pepe had gone to meet Pedro, the boy, divining that his de-

parture was connected with the business of the smugglers, waited for his mother to get to sleep, and stealing the boat, rowed across the river to give notice to his employer. He was ordered to return, and if his suspicions were confirmed, to display a single light. As it was considered certain that the smugglers would not attempt to cross in the immediate vicinity of the troops, other signals were also agreed upon. Thus, if they went up the river, towards Camargo, three lights were to be displayed. If they went down, towards Reynosa, two only were to be exhibited.

When this information was extracted, Pepe drew his knife, and addressed his son in the tone of a judge pronouncing sentence on a condemned felon.

"If you can remember a prayer, boy, I give you time to say it."

Gray looked at him to ascertain if he really was in earnest, or only frightening the urchin. There was no mistaking the fixed, determined stare of that stony eye. The boy, too, was so certain of his fate, that he wasted no time in useless entreaties. The tremor left his limbs—his lips moved in prayer, but slowly, and with no appearance of unusual emotion. It is astonishing with what calmness a Mexican can meet death when he knows that it is inevitable. The wretch whose trembling legs will scarce sustain him through a single round on the battle-field, will walk to his grave with a cigarita in his mouth, and kneel by its side as coolly as if it was only an appointed place for an hour's recreation; while the Englishman or the American, who will fight until his limbs are hacked from his body, always approaches the place of execution with evident dread, and sometimes with shameful weakness. Whatever the cause, the son of Pepe Benito, who had shivered as if afflicted with an ague-fit under his father's questioning, now became the calmest of the group, and looked up at the gleam-

ing knife with an eye that showed no sign of quailing. His brief prayer ended, he said, slowly and firmly,

"I am ready. Strike!"

In another minute he would have been in eternity, for the glittering blade was making a rapid descent directly on the jugular vein. With a quick motion, Gray caught the arm of the remorseless parent.

"Devil!" he exclaimed, "would you murder your own son in cold blood?"

"Murder him! Has he not betrayed me, and you, and Señor Piedras? *Carajo*, he deserves twenty deaths!"

Pedro, who had watched the whole scene with singular unconcern, now interposed:

"You must spare him, Pepe, since the Señor Gray will have it so. Keep him fast bound, to prevent further mischief. When we have crossed the river, take him with you to Corpus Christi. You cannot remain here. If you do, the lanceros will hang you as soon as they discover we have eluded them. Bind the *Muchacho*, place him under the charge of his mother, and come back without delay. We have much to do."

The ruffian father departed, in obedience to his instructions, taking his captive son along with him. On his return, Pedro asked, shortly,

"What kind of landing is there at the bend, two leagues below?"

"On this side, steep and bad; on the other, good."

"Very well. An hour before daylight, show the lanceros a single light. There can be no harm in telling them what they already know, and it will keep them where they are for another day. At dark to-morrow night, show three lights, to indicate that we have gone up stream, get into your boat, drop down to the bend, and wait for me there."

"It shall be done, Señor."

"Then good-night, Pepe. Take care of your son, Diego, and see that you have him at Corpus Christi on my return."

The veteran smuggler was not accustomed to exhibit any sign of emotion, either at the success or failure of his plans, and Gray was in doubt whether he was annoyed or gratified by the night's occurrences. In silence they galloped back to the place where the little band was hidden. The sound of the horses' feet roused them from the cat-like slumber of men accustomed to sleep in the midst of danger; a low challenge was promptly given, and as promptly answered. No explanations were vouchsafed — they were simply informed that they were to remain where they were until the coming evening, and that every man and horse was, in the meantime, to be kept as closely under cover as if an enemy was in a few hundred *varas*. Throughout the day, the men slumbered upon their blankets, or sat listlessly whitling dry sticks for an occupation. Before the sun had fairly sunk below the horizon, the smugglers were on the march for the river. There was no vestige of a road, and thickets of chaparal constantly obstructed their progress. Pedro took the lead, and threaded the difficult way with a patience and sagacity no obstacle could overcome. At the designated spot on the river, they found Pepe in waiting with his boat.

"What has become of the Lanceros, Pepe?" was the first question propounded by Pedro.

"They are off up the river by this time. I showed the three lights just after dark. As I floated down the stream, I saw them busily replenishing their fires. Fools! to think they could deceive *me* by such a poor trick as that."

No further time was lost in conversation. The horses were quickly unloaded, and the packs transferred to Pepe's boat.

"We have to swim for it, Señor Gray," said Pedro: "the boat will carry no more than the packs. The current, though narrow, is deep, and strong. Yours is a wild, ungovernable

brute, and will probably grow restive in the water. Give me your rein."

"Not so, Pedro. I must manage him myself. If he and I live, we are likely to get into many a scrape together, and it is needful he should learn to obey his master implicitly."

The noble animal, whom Gray had named Saxon in compliment to the inn-keeper at San Felipe de Austin, disappointed the expectations of Pedro. He took the water as kindly as the trained horses of the Mexicans, and breasted the current with a stronger and more rapid stroke. He was far ahead, when they neared the low sand-bank that jutted out into the river on the southern side. Pepe followed the horsemen with his boat, and the work of reloading was rapidly completed. In a few minutes they were ready to resume their adventurous march. The hand of Pedro was on the mane, and his foot in the stirrup; but before mounting, he turned once more to Pepe.

"My advice to you, is, to put as many leagues of ground between you and the Rio Grande, by daylight, as possible. You can be of no further use here. That boy's folly has spoiled this crossing for a long time to come. Go at once to Corpus Christi. Your neck will be in very great danger if to-morrow's sun finds you lingering in this vicinity. *Adios.*"

"*Adios,* Señor, *Adios todos,*" was the only reply.

A deep ravine, or rather gully, washed by the torrents of the rainy season, extended from the bank of the river for more than a mile into the country. Along this ravine the smugglers moved in single file, Pedro, as usual, taking the lead. Being entirely free from the thorny bushes of the higher ground, it offered the double advantage of speed and security. At the head of the ravine the party was halted, and one of the number climbed up the bank on foot to reconnoitre. The moon had now risen, and in that climate objects are distinctly visible by its light at almost incredible distances. An examination of some minutes satisfied the "look-out," that no

danger was ahead, and he accordingly reported "all clear." Pedro led the way up the sloping bank, and entering a cattle path leading in the direction of China, spurred his horse into a rapid trot — a pace that was continued until after midnight. They had long been travelling a beaten road, though it did not appear to be a public one, which wound through one of those old peach-orchard-looking wastes, common upon the Rio Grande. The trained band halted at a signal of their leader, still, silent, and motionless as statues. Their eyes were fixed upon him, as he leaned forward upon the neck of his steed, and bent his gaze eagerly in the direction they were going. Apparently he was soon satisfied, for straightening himself on his horse, he dashed off towards a cluster of chaparal bushes on the left, exclaiming, "Quick! follow me!" Within the cover of the bushes, every man was ordered to dismount, prepare his arms, and stand by his horse. Taking Gray by the arm, he led him to the outer limits of the bushes.

"I saw the gleaming of lances in the moonlight, Señor, and we may have a hard fight to save our packs."

"From the specimens of Mexican courage I have witnessed," replied Gray with a cold sneer, "I suppose our friends here will leave us to fight out the battle by ourselves."

"No, no. These men are of a different mettle. I selected them myself, and each one will fight as desperately as you, or I."

By this time the gleaming of the lances was perceptible even to Gray's inexperienced eye. Gradually the dark forms of the horsemen were clearly defined. A little nearer, and the notes of a warlike song were audible. The voices of the whole party swelled the concluding verse:

"Gloria, gloria! yo no quiero
Una vergonzosa paz,
Busco en medio de la guerra
La muerte ó la libertad."

"They are not looking for us," whispered Pedro, "or they would not be making that infernal noise. It is well for them too, that they are not; for in that case they might find the death they say they are seeking, without a great deal of trouble."

The wary Mexican, however, relaxed none of his vigilance, notwithstanding his conviction that they were bent upon some errand unconnected with his own operations.

"*Uno, dos, tres, cuarto, cinco, seis, siete, ocho, nueve, diez,*" he counted audibly as the Lancers rode by. "*Diez no mas.*"

There was a pause among the Lancers, when they arrived at the place where Pedro had turned from the road. The song was hushed, and two of the troopers dismounted to examine the tracks discovered by their leader. They could not mistake the freshness of the signs, nor the place to which they led. There was a hurried consultation, and then their horses' heads were turned towards the thicket where the smugglers were concealed.

"Diablo!" muttered Pedro. "That fellow had better have been born blind."

Discovery was inevitable—successful flight impossible. The smugglers were armed with escopetas and sabres. Their horses were the best to be obtained in Mexico. The men themselves were desperate characters, who had faced many a danger in their lawless career, and participated in many a bloody encounter. Their orders were received with the coolness of veterans, and executed as promptly. Under any circumstances, they would have been formidable foes to better soldiers than the best Lancers in Mexico. Leading them as near to the open ground as he could, without exposing their numbers and position, Pedro briefly communicated his instructions. "Not a shot," he said, "must be fired until I give the word. After the first volley, mount, and charge with your sabres. Fire low, and remember," he sternly added, "all

ust be killed. *Not one* must escape to give an alarm, that ill bring hundreds after us to-morrow."

A dead silence reigned in the thicket. The perfect stillness duced the Lancers to believe that the party they were pur- ning, and whom they probably imagined to be tobacco smug- lers, had passed round the cluster of bushes, and kept on to he interior. Under this impression, they were momently xpecting to find the trail taking a circuitous direction. They ad approached within thirty yards, when the voice of Pedro ang loud and fierce upon the night air — "Fire." In an nstant a leaden hail was showered upon the astonished troopers.

"Now mount, and charge," was the quick command of the muggler leader.

The assault had been so sudden and deadly, that the Lancers rho were unhurt had no time to prepare for either resistance r flight. Their enemies were among them before their lances ould be levelled to meet the charge. One only shook off the umbing sensation, and fled from the bloody scene. Gray narked him, and wheeled his horse in pursuit. The Mexican vas well mounted, and no people better understand how to get he greatest amount of work out of their animals. For some dis- ance he kept the advantage he had gained in the start; but he long stride of the American horse soon began to tell. With eadlong speed, pursuer and pursued dashed over the lonely vaste. The sounds of conflict died away behind them as the lreadful chase was continued. The stillness of the hour im- parted to the tramp of the horses' feet a sound like distant hunder. In the bosom of one rider, dark and deadly pas- ions were rioting — in that of the other, pale Terror gathered is spectre troops. The stake is life, the forfeit, death; and ach is struggling with appalling energy for the victory. A leep baranca at length interposed an impassable barrier to the progress of the flying Mexican. The sharp angle it was ne- essary to make gave his adversary a fearful advantage, and

nearer and nearer sounded the tread of the iron-grey steed. One chance for safety remained. Suddenly throwing himself from his horse, the Mexican rushed towards the baranca. On the margin of the ravine a stunted tree was growing. The rains had washed away the dirt from the spreading roots that formed a tangled network along the bank. In his haste, the Mexican placed his foot upon one of the weaker roots, which bent beneath his weight. His foot slipped; the long spur became entangled in the matted roots, and, falling forward, he hung suspended, head downwards, over the yawning chasm. His fierce pursuer had likewise abandoned his steed, and now stood over the helpless wretch.

"*Misericordia!*" he cried; "*misericordia por amor de Dios!*"

The answer was a sabre-thrust, which sent the blood gurgling from his chest in a foamy torrent through his mouth. Leaving him to feast the vultures, suspended where he died, Gray remounted his horse, and rode leisurely back to the scene of conflict. Every man of the Lancers had been killed; and by the time Gray returned, their bodies had been robbed of everything of the slightest value. In this agreeable occupation, his companions had almost forgotten his own absence. They now crowded around him to learn the result of the chase. His story was briefly and simply told. A murmur of satisfaction ran through the group, and in less than an hour the daring outlaws were again upon the road, exhibiting no sign of apprehension, except in the greater celerity of their march.

CHAPTER VII.

"The spur hath lanced his courser's sides;
Away, away, for life he rides;
Swift as the hurled on high jerreed,
Springs to the touch the startled steed."

On a wide plain, three leagues from the city of Monterey, there stood, in the year 1833, one of those fortified Haciendas that had probably been built by the early conquerors of Mexico. A stone fence, miles in extent, surrounded the cultivated grounds. Through this an immense gate, arched and sculptured, admitted the visitor into a long, straight avenue, adorned with a row of trees on each side, and beautified by flowers. The Hacienda itself was of solid stone, built in the form of a square, and covering nearly an acre of ground. Neither windows nor loop-holes were pierced through the outer walls. Against the interior of these walls were built, on one side, the rooms occupied by the owner and his family; on another, the kitchen and servants' rooms; and on a third, the carriage-house and stables. The roofs of the houses were nearly flat, covered with stones united by a cement nearly as hard as the rock itself. Above the walls rose a stone curtain, three feet in height, crenelled and loop-holed for defence. In the middle of the square was an artificial lake, surrounded by an enclosure of stone and cement. In the centre of the lake half rose the figure of a Naiad, grasping in its extended hand a spiral fountain, from which the living waters gushed in crystal beauty. Tiny walks led, through beds of flowers, to the broad gravel-way on either side, and evergreen shrubs mingled their ver-

dure with the many-colored blossoms a tropical sun had warmed into life.

Who would have supposed that this was the abode of a smuggler — that all this wealth, and all these luxuries, were the product of a lawless traffic? Who, seated by that dreamy lake, breathing a thousand odors, and listening to the low music of the guitar, catching additional softness and melody from the rich voice of the dark-eyed Senorita mingling with its notes — who, in the midst of such enchantments, could realize the tale of crime connected with every flowery shrub around him? Who could imagine that geranium watered by an orphan's tears — that rosebud catching its hues from the purple stream that welled from a dead man's bosom — or that lily blanched into whiteness by the human groans that sweep through its leaves? It is natural enough to connect dark deeds with the lonely glen, or the blasted waste; but to witness pale ghosts wandering among parterres of flowers — to see a clear fountain bubbling up through a lake of blood — or to hear the sweet music won by pleading love from beauty mingled with a murderer's oaths, or a victim's shrieks—this, this is horrible! these are sights and sounds to make the Furies turn away with a shudder.

It was dark night when Pedro and his party approached the Hacienda. Its inmates were buried in profound repose; but a sharp whistle, three times repeated, acted like magic on the drowsy warder. Leaning over the stone curtain above the entrance, he asked a few brief questions in a low tone, and, being satisfied with the answers, hurried off to rouse the proprietor. In an uncommonly short space of time, for a Mexican, he returned, and, throwing open the heavy gate, admitted his midnight visitors. By this time, lights began to flash from the windows of the apartments, and a number of Peons gathered in the court-yard. Not long afterwards, the owner of the Hacienda made his appearance, and was greeted by

Pedro as Don Estevan Llano, with every outward mark of deep respect. The horses were unpacked, the goods stored away, and the wearied travellers, after partaking of the refreshments Don Estevan had ordered, were shown to their sleeping apartment. Early the next day, a careful inventory was taken, and Don Estevan commenced sending the goods, in very small parcels at a time, to his business house, in the city of Monterey. This was done by his own Peons, who, from being known, were less likely to incur suspicion, or meet with hindrance. The process was slow, and required seven or eight days for its completion. Gray had nothing to do, in the meantime, besides wandering about the premises, and admiring the ornamented grounds. He asked no questions of any one belonging to the establishment; but he marked everything unusual, and, when alone with Pedro, sought the explanation from him. From Pedro he also learned, that Don Estevan was a native of the capital, where his circumstances had been greatly straitened by gambling and luxurious living. His diminished fortune no longer permitting him to continue the style of living to which he was accustomed, he had removed to Monterey, and become a partner in a mercantile firm. It was here he formed the acquaintance of Bartolo Piedras, and from that day, riches flowed in apace upon Don Estevan Llano. The immense profits of their illicit traffic had enabled him to purchase the Hacienda where he now resided, and which, with all its luxuries, with all the refinement of taste it exhibited, was, in truth, nothing but a den of smugglers. The business in the city was conducted almost exclusively by his partners. He remained himself at his country-seat, to receive the goods, and provide for their introduction within the walls. Notwithstanding the marked respect Pedro always manifested for him, it was certain that the old Mexican had little love for the proud Hidalgo, and trusted him no farther than was absolutely necessary, or than his instructions positively required. If this dis-

trust had attracted the attention of Gray at all, he had only noted it as another evidence of the extreme caution which marked the conduct of his companion. On the fourth day after their arrival, Don Estevan went himself into the city. It was late in the evening when he returned. Pedro and Gray were standing by the little lake, apparently admiring the fountain, though, in reality, they had sought this spot to converse with greater freedom. Don Estevan rode into the courtyard, and, throwing his bridle-rein to a servant, approached the spot where they were standing. Addressing Gray with a self-satisfied air, he said:

"I doubt, Señor, if there be anything in your boasted land to equal the loveliness of my poor place."

"No, Señor. We are a rough and hardy race, and have hitherto been too much occupied in subduing the wilderness to devote a great deal of time to ornamental luxury. Perhaps there may be, in some of the wealthier districts, grounds that might vie with yours; but my eyes have never rested upon them. The superfluities, however, that we do possess, even in the poorest regions, are rendered doubly valuable by the reflection that no frowning battlements are required to guard them."

"Pray what do you wish me to understand from that?"

"That it is better to sleep in peace and security under a thorn tree, than to be continually trembling in Eden, lest the hand of lawless violence should rob us of its sweets."

"Ah! and so you think that life and property are insecure under our benignant laws."

"Pardon me, Señor, if I speak plainly. Yonder walls, and that loop-holed curtain of stone above them, are poor witneses of a peaceful state."

"They were built long ago, and more in accordance with a taste derived by our ancestors from the Moors, than from any actual necessity. They are of little service now."

"Yet they are carefully guarded."

"Because there is treasure within them, and gold has lured, and will lure men to robbery and murder in every land. I do not pretend that deeds of violence are unknown in Mexico, any more than in other countries. Indeed I heard of one to-day," he continued, after a moment of reflection, "that I am surprised escaped the ear of my good friend Pedro, on his journey hither."

"Will Don Estevan," asked Pedro, coldly, and deliberately, "be good enough to relate the story."

"It is said that not many leagues from the Rio Grande, on the route you must have journeyed, a Lieutenant and nine Lancers were surprised, and every man slaughtered."

The words were spoken slowly, and his eyes were bent upon his confederate with a gaze so intent, that it seemed as if he wished to read his soul in his countenance; but that weather-beaten face was proof against his scrutiny. Not a muscle quivered — not a shade passed over it. His eye was calm and steady, and his voice unruffled, as he replied,

"I had too much at stake to waste time in inquiring the news by the way. Nor is it to be wondered at, that a report which has only reached Don Estevan himself to-day, should have escaped the ears of men intent, upon avoiding all communication with the people of the country. Possibly it was done by Agatone's band. At any rate, Señor, the less that is said of my route, the safer will it be for Piedras and yourself. For you especially, since the Señor Piedras is not likely to leave the distant province of Texas, where he has many means of escape, to throw himself into the hands of the law. To you on the other hand, surrounded as you are, discovery is destruction."

Don Estevan grew a shade paler, as the probable consequences were thus plainly pointed out.

"I meant not," he replied, rather hurriedly, "to speak of

it to another than yourself. I had no purpose to communicate to any one the fact, that you had journeyed by the spot about the time these murders were committed."

"You could not communicate what you did not know. Neither I, nor any of my people, have informed you what road we travelled. For your sake, as well as my own, I shall still keep it secret. If any suspicion should fall on me, I have not neglected to provide ample proofs of my innocence. My neck is therefore safe — property I have none, and can not be injured in that way. You are differently situated. If it could be proven that you had sheltered here for days, a man suspected of cutting to pieces a squad of government Lancers, you too would be arrested, and though it is certain you would be acquitted in the end, it is equally certain that the officers of the law would not permit that acquittal to take place until your purse was completely drained."

Don Estevan listened with downcast eyes to the undeniable truths that the smuggler thus coolly uttered. His changing color evinced that he was affected seriously, and when he looked up there was more agitation in his manner than the occasion warranted in a man who meditated no treachery.

"You are right, Pedro: I should be robbed without mercy. I must inquire what my people have heard of this unfortunate affair, and caution them to be discreet."

Pedro looked after him until he had passed beyond hearing, then quietly remarked,

"I fear me, Don Estevan will not live long."

"Why?" asked Gray, in astonishment. "He seems to be in the enjoyment of excellent health."

"I have known more robust persons than he, to die very suddenly after meditating treachery to the Señor Bartolo Piedras."

"Surely you do not suspect him of this."

"I suspect every man in Mexico whose life or property I

do not hold in my grasp, and I am tolerably certain that Don Estevan has admired other things to-day, besides the beauty of these flowers. I should not be surprised if he has had visions of a shady grove outside the walls of Monterey, with a gallows in perspective, and you, and I, and our four comrades hanging on it as ornaments."

"Surely you are unjust to him, Pedro: he could have no possible motive to plot mischief against us."

"Possibly I may be wrong, *mi amigo*, but I have passed through a stern school, and learned my lessons heedfully. Let us suppose a case. Let us suppose that there should already have dawned upon Don Estevan's mind some such truth as you announced a little while since — that it was better to be content with a little, than to be continually disturbed by fears of losing a great deal. Suppose he should be of the opinion that he had accumulated a sufficiency for his wants, and should desire to possess that sufficiency in security. In that case, it would be natural, would it not, to begin by breaking off his illegal traffic with Bartolo Piedras? As a consequence of that, and in order to recommend himself to the favor of the government, it is not impossible that he might contemplate giving information that would lead to the execution of the daring free-traders, who had destroyed a favorite body of Lancers."

Gray needed no further explanation. Recalling the manner of Don Estevan while conversing with Pedro, he was satisfied he had been meditating some such villanous scheme as Pedro had pictured. His face grew white with a deadly anger.

"If I could obtain the least proof of this," he said, sternly, "I would sprinkle these walks with his heart's blood, before bidding adieu to his Hacienda."

"And thus," was the cool rejoinder, "insure your execution and mine. No, no. Leave him to Piedras. His doom is written. I think I have so far frightened him, that his amiable scheme will be abandoned for the present; and even

if it is not, we are safe. Within these walls he dare not have us arrested. Once beyond them, I am too old a fox to be trapped by a hunter like Don Estevan Llano."

"I do not like," said Gray, "to trust my revenge to other hands; nor do I see how Bartolo Piedras, with all his art, is to reach him here."

"You have much to learn, Señor Gray, which may not advantage our common employer: but I have sworn to be your friend, and that is what I never did for him. Nor do I betray him by revealing that which I found out before he trusted me with the secret. Two of Don Estevan's most trusted servants are completely in the interest and in the power of Piedras. He pays them well; and, if such an improbable thing as disobedience to his orders should occur, they are fully apprised that he knows enough to hang them at his pleasure. They are said to be familiar with the properties of certain herbs growing in the valleys of the Sierra Madre, that the learned in physic pronounce inimical to human life. Let us enter the house," he continued, in a louder tone. "Time has slipped rapidly away, while we have been admiring the beauty of this fountain, and the perfection of that marble Naiad."

Mabry Gray was swiftly passing through a fearful noviciate. He had found the life of adventure for which he panted, but in finding it, he had become involved in dark and murderous schemes and intrigues, that he was not yet sufficiently hardened to contemplate without bitter and remorseful reflections. His breast was consumed by a burning thirst that water would not allay; and, on entering his own apartment, he eagerly seized a bottle containing a stronger liquid. The hand of the friendly Mexican was placed upon his arm, and a warning voice whispered in his ear,

"Touch it not, Señor. We are surrounded by pretended friends and secret spies. Our lives may depend upon coolness and caution. Knowing the habits of your countrymen, Don

Estevan has placed that bottle here in the hope that under its influence he may learn something from you he despairs of extracting from me. Touch it not, therefore, and remember always, that when a Mexican invites you to drink, or places brandy in your reach, except upon convivial occasions, it is certain that he is trying to throw you off your guard, and expects some advantage therefrom."

Reluctantly Gray relinquished the bottle, which Pedro immediately emptied of its contents.

"There," he said. "You can feign intoxication, if you choose; and perhaps it would be the wisest course."

For the first time, Llano seated himself at the supper-table with his confederate guests. Of the party, Pedro alone understood English; and Gray's stammering, imperfect pronunciation of the Spanish, materially aided him in the drunken part he was to play. His voice was loud — his manner rude, and he was continually committing breaches of Spanish decorum. It was surprising with what complacency all this was regarded by the haughty Don, who, under other circumstances, would have abruptly left the table without a moment's hesitation. In the present instance, his forbearance was poorly rewarded. No allusion to the affair with the Lancers, or to any circumstance that might indicate the route they had travelled, escaped from the lips of any of the party, and Don Estevan rose from the table no wiser than when he sat down. Throughout the next day, he was busily engaged in transmitting the smuggled goods to the city of Monterey; and Pedro was as busily, though very quietly, making preparations for his own departure. Not choosing to be more communicative than was absolutely necessary, he had fixed a more distant day for his return than the one on which he really intended it should take place. Accordingly, at the end of a week, Don Estevan was surprised by the announcement that Pedro proposed to set out that day for Corpus Christi. He made little objection to the arrangement,

though it seemed to Gray that he was, from some cause, desirous that it should be postponed. Openly, in broad daylight, they bade adieu to the inmates of the Hacienda; and, assuming the character of legitimate traders, moved deliberately along the main road to China. Near nightfall, they halted, and arranged their camp, as if no distrust or suspicion afflicted them. To all appearance, they were preparing in conscious security for a night's repose. No such purpose was entertained — Pedro was too wary a leader to risk an encampment within a few leagues of a man whose good faith he strongly doubted. As soon as darkness had completely wrapped the earth in its mantle, they were again in the saddle — the highway to China was abandoned, and the party struck across the country for Mier. Riding all night, and pressing their steeds to their utmost capacity, it was not long after noon when they arrived at the last-named town. Here it was necessary to halt. Prudence suggested that in passing through the town, there should be no appearanee of haste; and besides, both men and horses were in much need of rest. Entering a *posada* on one side of the main *Plaza*, Pedro issued all the necessary orders with a calm voice and an undisturbed manner. He was far, however, from feeling at ease. His suspicions of Don Estevan's treacherous intentions had lost none of their force, and he could not feel secure to the southward of the Rio Grande. His companions eagerly availed themselves of the opportunity to snatch an hour's slumber. Pedro slept not. In his assumed character of a licensed trader, he was enabled to make many unsuspected inquiries, and to pick up much valuable information. This determined him to cross the Rio Grande near Mier, instead of proceeding along the road to Camargo.

After the party had been refreshed by a halt of two hours, they were ordered to saddle up. Gray rode with them to the river. Here he ascertained that it was Pedro's purpose to camp on the opposite bank for the night, and determined to

gratify his own inclination to return into the town, not doubting that he could easily rejoin his comrades by day-break. Pedro in vain earnestly remonstrated against the rashness of such a step. Gray was in one of those obstinate moods, that often led him into perils, from which his escape was almost miraculous. He had learned that there was to be a *fandango* in the town, and was resolved not to miss this opportunity of witnessing a Mexican dance. Pedro finally insisted upon returning with him. To this also, Gray interposed a decided negative. The men, he argued, if left to themselves, might be guilty of some misconduct, or commit some imprudence that would be followed by serious consequences. The old Mexican was at last compelled to acquiesce, though reluctantly, and with a degree of emotion he had rarely ever been known to manifest.

"Your horse, Señor," he said at parting, "is fleet and strong. Keep him saddled, and be ready to mount at a moment's warning. Make for the river, the instant you observe any sign of hostility. If they attempt to pursue you further, it must be a strong body that we can not send to the right about. Watch well, and remember that if any thing happens to you, I cannot live foresworn."

Gray made light of his apprehensions, but at the same time divested himself of every thing that would impede a rapid flight. The turnings of the road, rendered necessary by the deep gullies cut in the loose soil during the rainy season, make the distance from Mier to the Rio Grande about a Spanish league, or nearly three English miles. Riding slowly back, Gray marked with the eye of a hawk, every point of advantage afforded by the ground, in flight or pursuit. At the *Posada* he threw his bridle-rein over a post, and entered the public room. It was unoccupied except by a young girl who was busily weaving a Mexican blanket. Addressing her

in very indifferent Spanish, he inquired if he could obtain accommodations for the night.

"It will be safer, Sir," was the reply in English, "to rejoin your comrades."

"I am a peaceful citizen of the department of Texas, and can not imagine what I have to fear in Tamaulipas. I was tempted to remain by the *fandango* of to-night, and that temptation has been greatly increased by hearing the accents of my native land breathed from lips so sweet. Will you accept me as a partner for the dance."

"If you remain in Mier until the sun goes down, Death will be your probable partner."

The earnest manner of the girl made a deep impression upon Gray, reckless as he was. He took her hand in his own, and touched it with his lips before he replied:

"Tell me first, where you learned to speak English so perfectly, and then you can inform me what danger threatens me so imminently."

"I am a native of Louisiana, though my parents are Spanish. You can easily judge what danger threatens you, when I tell you, that, some ten or twelve days ago, a party of Lancers were surprised and destroyed within ten leagues of Mier. That a band of smugglers were known to be seeking a way into the interior at the very time, and that one of the Lancers was discovered, on examination, to have been killed with a rifle-bullet. You were observed to carry such a weapon to-day, and would have been arrested then, if there had been a Government force in the town."

"And do you think," he replied, "that there is danger of my being arrested on such slight circumstances as you have mentioned?"

"Arrested! If that was all I dreaded, I would not have braved my father's anger, to give you warning. You are an American, and to be arrested in Mexico implies chains and

torture at the least. In your case, that mercy will scarcely be accorded."

"Chains, and torture! Do you call that mercy?"

At this moment, the bugle-notes of a cavalry troop sounded loud and clear upon the street.

"Begone!" she exclaimed, hurriedly pulling him towards the door. "Begone before it is too late."

Gray turned his eyes up the street, and observing that he still had an advantage of more than a hundred yards, replied,

"Not until I have the name of my preserver."

"Inez, Sir, Inez. Oh! fly."

"It is a sweet name," he said, as he stooped to impress a kiss on her forehead, "and I shall remember it long. Farewell."

With a bound he was by the side of his gallant gray — in another instant, he was dashing along the stony street with the speed of the hurricane. The town of Mier is washed by a stream called the Alamo, which empties into the Rio Grande a few miles below. At the usual fording-place, the water in the dry season is not more than fetlock deep; just below the ford it deepens very considerably, and here the citizens are in the habit of daily bathing. Almost every evening forty or fifty Senoritas may be seen splashing and paddling in the stream, with no costume but that which nature bestows, utterly regardless of the presence of the opposite sex, who on their part seem, to an American, singularly indifferent to the varied charms thus frankly exposed to view. Gray had made directly for the ford. The hesitation of the Lancers, in the first moment of doubt and surprise, had allowed him to gain so great an advantage, that he felt secure from their pursuit; but as he turned the corner of the street, he perceived another body winding along the margin of the stream, much nearer to the ford than himself. Promptly his resolution was taken. Wheeling sharply to the left, he urged his horse into the water in

the very midst of the screaming Senoritas. A girl of fifteen, or sixteen, who was standing middle deep in the water, was so paralyzed by terror that she was unable to move, and, but for the address of the rider, would have been crushed beneath the horse's feet. Stooping as he passed, he caught her in his sinewy hand, and swung her to the croupe behind him. The Lancers, who had gained upon him greatly during the passage of the stream, unslung their escopetas, and prepared to fire. The officer in command was unwilling to harm the girl, and moreover believing that the capture of the fugitive was inevitable, ordered his men not to fire. For two miles further, the exciting race was continued. Saxon, even with his double burden, gaining at every bound upon his pursuers. Within a hundred yards of the river, Gray slackened his pace so as to drop the girl without danger to her limbs. The bank here rises seven or eight feet perpendicularly from the water — His momentary pause had allowed his enemies to regain their lost ground, and now that he was no longer protected by his living shield, a shower of balls whistled around him. Rising in his stirrups, and shaking his clenched hand above his head, with a fierce shout he dashed at the precipitous bank. The good steed took the fearful leap with as little hesitation as his rider. Horse and man were swallowed up by the rushing flood. In another moment, they rose to the surface; snorting, and scattering the water, in foam and spray, from his nostrils, the gallant gray bore his master swiftly to the opposite side. The Mexicans reined up in astonishment — no one among them was willing to take that hazardous leap. Some moments elapsed before their stupid amazement allowed them to think of resorting to their escopetas. It was then too late. The balls pattered harmlessly on the river, while Gray ascended the bank, and felt his hand cordially grasped by Pedro, who, on hearing the firing, had instantly paraded his men to render any assistance in his power.

"I had hoped for a night's repose at this point," remarked Pedro, when they had regained his camp; "but it will not do to run the risk. Sleep for a couple of hours, Señor. By that time we must be on the march. The Lancers will endeavor to intercept us by following the river to Camargo, and crossing there. By travelling north-west to the Laredo road, we shall be far enough beyond their reach by daylight. Sleep while you can, for we have much fatigue yet to undergo."

No further adventure interrupted the journey to Corpus Christi. On the night of their arrival, Gray retired early to repose, while Pedro, upon whose wiry frame no fatigue appeared to make an impression, sought the private apartment of Bartolo Piedras. Their conference lasted so long that the first streaks of dawn had begun to purple the east before Pedro sought the rough couch upon which he was accustomed to repose. During the day there was little communication between the principal personages at the Rancho. The evening meal was concluded, and Piedras, ordering a plentiful supply of wine and cigars, invited Gray to remain. His chair was drawn nearer to the table, and a bundle of papers produced from his pocket.

"Your expedition, Señor Gray, has been attended with unusual profit, as well as unusual hazard. If you choose to take the trouble to examine these papers, you will find that the nett proceeds amount to some fifteen thousand dollars. I have set apart one-third of this sum to be divided between Pedro and yourself. Does the amount content you?"

"It is more than I expected to accumulate in years, and more than I would accept for my own purposes."

"The money is yours," was the response, "and I have no right to inquire in what way you intend to appropriate it. Still, if you design making investments in this country, my advice might be of service to you."

"I do not propose to make investments of any kind. A

good horse, a good rifle, and a good knife are all the possessions I covet; and these I already have. This money will be appropriated in a different way. I left in San Felipe a friend who has stood by me through good and through evil report. He has sacrificed much on my account, and as he is now engaged in mercantile business, the sum which would be valueless to me, may be of great advantage to him."

"Ah!" responded Bartolo; "I remember my brother-in-law told me something of this. He is in the house of ———, is he not?" Receiving an affirmative answer, he continued: "Fortunately it is in my power to aid him still further than by the sum you propose to deposit with him. I have long had dealings with the house, and for my sake they would receive him as a partner, even if he furnished a smaller portion of the capital than he will now be able to do. You shall carry a letter from me which will place him on the highway to fortune. Nay," he added, as he saw Gray about to interrupt him, "nay, do not thank me. I serve my own ends in this matter, as well as yours. I can easily foresee that a day is at hand when I may need friends among your countrymen; and a zealous one is cheaply secured by simply pledging my credit to place him in a business that I know must be profitable."

Gray mused for some time before he replied:

"I am not sure that I understand you; but if I judge rightly, you anticipate a war between the Americans in Texas and the Mexican Government, and propose to unite yourself with us."

"No, Señor, I am a Mexican; and although I have not pursued the bubble reputation with any great avidity, I have no desire to have my name dabbled over with the filth of treason. In a war between Americans and Mexicans, I should certainly be found in the ranks of your enemies. That, however, is a madness on the part of your countrymen on which I have not calculated. In our own internal dissensions, it is

very probable they may be embroiled; but as I shall avoid all connection with either party, it is a matter of indifference to me on which side they are ranged. I was thinking of my own affairs; not of national revolutions. Through much toil and peril, I have accumulated some degree of wealth. Of course I am solicitous to retain what has been so hardly won. A slight mischance might any day forfeit all I have to the laws of Mexico. Against that I have attempted to guard, by placing a very considerable portion in the city of New Orleans; but if they could once secure possession of my person, upon plausible proof of smuggling, they would find means to extract from me more than I am willing to loose. Flight or concealment may therefore become necessary on short notice; and in either case my safety will greatly depend upon the friendship of your countrymen."

Gray did not attempt to conceal the surprise he felt at this candid communication.

"Why," he asked, "why continue in a pursuit of so much peril, after you have accumulated more than enough to satisfy your wants? Why not abandon it, and live free from such apprehensions?"

A meaning smile lighted up the face of the Mexican. It lingered but a moment, and then faded away.

"I might ask, Señor, in turn, why are you here, instead of following the less hazardous avocation of your friend. Perhaps I love the danger for the danger's sake. Perhaps I take pride in a struggle, where the skill, and caution, and courage of a single man, are matched against the constituted authorities of a nation. Perhaps I have other aims, to the accomplishment of which larger sums are needful than I possess. Any one or all of these reasons would be to some extent true. There is a more powerful one still. I can not abandon the traffic in which I am engaged, without incurring the distrust and suspicion of all my associates, and bringing upon myself

a more immediate danger than its continuance involves. Let us pass, however, from this episode, to other things that more nearly concern yourself. I propose that you shall set out in charge of a train of pack-mules, for San Felipe de Austin. Upon that expedition the risk is small, and I have placed it under your direction, chiefly because I supposed you would like to visit your friends. Pedro will remain in charge of the Rancho — to-morrow I depart for Monterey."

"For Monterey to-morrow!" exclaimed Gray. "This is sudden, and unexpected."

"Many a battle, Señor, has been won by decision and promptitude, when a little delay would have rendered courage and conduct unavailing. From what Pedro tells me, my friend Don Estevan Llano is in feeble health, and it is necessary for me to provide some other agency for introducing my goods into the capital of New Leon."

Not a tremor shook the voice of the extraordinary man who uttered these significant words. His countenance was unchanged, and Gray, who was yet in his noviciate, gazed at him with a compound feeling that language has no words to describe. Piedras had moved the lamp so as to throw its full light upon his auditor, and doubtless read much of the answer in his face before it was uttered.

"I will not affect to misunderstand you, Señor Piedras, for you must be aware that I left Don Estevan in perfect health, and that I can not be deceived as to the purpose of your visit. I will add that my own observations served to confirm Pedro's suspicions of his treachery, and I am by no means certain, that I do not owe to him a dangerous plunge into the Rio Grande. Still if you propose to get rid of him by any means, except with a strong hand, and in open day, I would rather not be informed of it more explicitly."

The reply of Piedras was delivered in that low, cold, re-

morseless tone, which makes the blood creep through the arteries with a dull and slimy flow.

"If you found a deadly reptile in your path, or a dangerous wild beast, would you hesitate at any means to remove it? Now," he continued, without giving Gray an opportunity to answer the question, "Don Estevan Llano is indebted to me for many things besides the wealth by which he is surrounded. Another in my place would feel indignant at his ingratitude, and meditate revenge. I am so good-natured, that I could easily forgive the wrong he has contemplated, if I could only be certain no such thing would cross his mind hereafter. You would dash out his brains from anger — I shall dry up the fountain of his existence, because it is necessary for my future security. We arrive at the same end, impelled by different causes, and travelling different routes, but mine is the safer."

"Safer it is true," Gray could not resist the inclination to say, "safer, but not quite so manly."

"That depends," was the cool and passionless rejoiner, "a great deal upon the idea attached to manliness. If you mean mere brute force, you are certainly in the right; but if patience, sagacity, and intellect, are taken into the account, you are decidedly in the wrong. I shrink not from the employment of open force when it is needful, and my hand has often proved its capacity to serve its owner well. But there are times, and occasions, when force can not be employed, and this is one of them. We may as well drop the subject however, since, under present circumstances, you could not aid me if you were willing to do so; nor can I myself tell in what way I may find it necessary to act. Make your arrangements for visiting San Felipe at your own convenience; before the dawn, I shall be on the road to Monterey. Upon my return, we may converse further upon this evening's topic. Good night."

Gray sought his own apartment. There was something so horrible to him in the idea of murder upon a simple calcula-

tion of gain or loss—murder without anger—without hate—without a feeling of revenge, that slumber was frightened away; and he paced his room for hours, absorbed in the reflections it suggested. He had been permitted to take a glance at a new leaf in the written character of a terrible man, and it was difficult to say whether loathing or wonder predominated. The sound of horses' feet in the court-yard, apprized him that Bartolo Piedras was about to set out on his journey, before he resigned himself to the arms of sleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Not that he was not sometimes rash or so,
But never in his real and serious mood;
Then calm, concentrated, and still, and slow,
He lay coiled like the boa in the wood;
With him it never was a word and blow.
His angry word once o'er, he shed no blood,
But in his silence there was much to rue,
And his *one* blow left little work for two."

Bartolo Piedras was gone. Mabry Gray rose unrefreshed from a feverish sleep, in which pale corpses, whose features were contorted by the agonies of an unnatural death, flitted before his mental vision. Then a spectre troop gathered in a horrid circle around his bed. A cold hand touched him, and a low whisper, yet distinct, and startling as the thunder-peal, shook his iron frame, and made him leap in terror from his couch. The broad sun was shining through the single window of his room, and the busy sounds of human life were audible in the court-yard. But even these palpable realities failed, for a time, to drive away the ghastly phantoms that had peopled his dreams. It was as much to escape from thought, as from any actual haste, that he called Pedro, and went busily

to work in making preparations for his departure. By the end of the fourth day, everything was arranged to his satisfaction, and on the fifth, his train of pack-mules was on the route for San Felipe de Austin. On this expedition, no extraordinary precautions were necessary. The government officers at Copano were the only ones to be avoided, and these always kept such poor watch, that they were generally believed to be in the pay of Piedras. The journey was accomplished, for the most part, in broad day, and the goods safely landed, without interruption, at San Felipe. Here Gray found that the fame of his adventures had preceded him, and his wild ride upon the prairie had already won for him, among the American settlers, the *soubriquet* of "Mustang," by which he was ever afterwards known. A husband less confiding than Saxon, might have objected to the warmth of Josefa's greeting; but, in truth, the hardy backwoodsman had too good an opinion of himself to be afflicted with a passion so humiliating as jealousy. Moreover, he was as proud as his wife of the achievements of their joint protégé, and loved almost as well to sing his praises in the ear of every villager who had time to listen. John Allison met him as the true-hearted meet a friend who has been exposed to much hardship and peril, and triumphed in the encounter. There was in his greeting sympathy for his sufferings, pride in his success, joy at feeling once more the clasp of that friendly hand, and an earnest hope that he would now abandon his dangerous career, and settle down into more lawful as well as more peaceful pursuits. Alas! John Allison knew not that such a life would be utterly insupportable to Mabry Gray. The demon in his breast would only slumber when its victim was in action. New adventures — new perils, must be sought. In repose he could have found no refuge from madness but in suicide — and suicide is madness and cowardice combined.

The period of Gray's stay at San Felipe had been left by Bartolo Piedras entirely to his own discretion. The politic

Mexican was desirous that an agent, whose services he valued so highly, should be conscious of no restraint, and that all his actions should seem to be regulated by his own will. This freedom to do as he pleased unquestioned, would not have induced Gray to remain longer than his business rendered necessary, if it had not been for the political questions then agitating the colonists. To these questions he had heretofore given little attention; indeed, he only cared for them now so far as they might have the effect of driving his countrymen into rebellion against the central government. From the daily discussions they excited, he soon possessed himself of all the information he desired; and was rejoiced to see that, from the temper of the people, a war at no distant day was inevitable.

Under the Mexican confederation, Coahuila and Texas were united in a single State. Widely separated by distance, with different and sometimes conflicting interests, it naturally followed that the wants of the weaker were disregarded, while the stronger claimed the whole care of the legislature. Impelled by their necessities, and relying upon the faithful services they had rendered to Santa Anna, the Americans in Texas resolved to insist upon their right to a separate legislature. To render their petition more effective, Stephen F. Austin departed in person for the city of Mexico. A wide change had, in the meantime, been effected in the sentiments of Santa Anna. He had tasted the sweets of power, and felt no inclination to resign it. Entering into a shameless bargain with the priests, who had been formerly his deadliest enemies, he bent all his energies, in conjunction with them, to destroy that constitution, in defence of which he had first taken up arms. The Americans were sure to resent and resist this approach to a despotism they abhorred. News travelled slowly to the distant province in which they were located; and when received, the channels through which it flowed were often so uncertain, as to render it unreliable. The voice of rebellion

was silent as yet; but Santa Anna was too sagacious not to know, that, when his schemes were laid bare, it would make itself heard in thunder-tones. He was, therefore, in no mind to concede to the people a legislature whose first labors would probably be directed to the concentration of the entire strength of the State in opposition to himself. Their petition was treated with scorn, and Austin cast into a dungeon.

The Mexican people were, in the meantime, wholly ignorant of the state of affairs in Texas. The intelligent and well-informed of their own race who had settled there, were either proscribed by the Dictator, or, from long association, had adopted the principles, and cordially espoused the cause of the colonists. Ignorant of the character of the people, and with no one to enlighten them as to the causes of discontent, the low mutterings of the storm in a distant province were unheard, or regarded with contempt. The Government itself, though better informed, over-estimated its own powers of compulsion, and proportionably undervalued those of resistance. The Texan Revolution, when it did begin, found them unprepared for anything beyond a temporary outbreak.

Satisfied that war must come, Gray returned to Corpus Christi with the resolution of dissolving his connection with Bartolo Piedras, and taking his place in the ranks of his countrymen. Its owner was still absent when he rode into the Rancho at the mouth of the Nueces; but a messenger, who had preceded him, brought the news that his return might be daily looked for. Gray was not sorry for his absence, since it afforded him an opportunity for a long and unrestrained conference with Pedro, to whom he communicated the result of his observations at San Felipe, and his determination in regard to his future course.

"Not yet, Señor," was the reply. "Not yet. I have long seen it must come; but the day is more distant than you anticipate. You and I will have time enough to take another

mustang hunt on the prairie, or, it may be, another journey to Monterey. Your people will not resort to arms, if they can help it, until their Empressario is free from the clutches of Santa Anna. When the time for actual fighting arrives, I shall join your side. Until then, our best course is to remain quietly here. Bartolo Piedras, with all his wisdom, regards a revolution in Texas as madness, and would be more likely to suspect us of treachery to him, than the folly of espousing a cause he believes so utterly desperate."

"What do I care for his suspicions?" Gray impatiently asked. "If he has paid us liberally, we have served him faithfully. We owe him nothing, and there is nothing to tie us here against our wills."

"Humph!" replied the Mexican, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Have you heard, Señor, that Don Estevan Llano is numbered with the Saints?"

A quivering sensation shook the frame of Gray, like that we experience when brought unexpectedly in contact with a venomous reptile.

"I comprehend," at length he said, "all your question implies, and feel, perhaps, more horror than you suppose at the idea of dying like a dog by poison; but Señor Piedras has as much to fear from my suspicions as I from his; for if he gives me the least occasion to believe that he intends to treat me as I doubt not he has done Don Estevan, I shall try the temper of my bowie-knife on his ribs."

"Bartolo Piedras will give you no intimation of his designs. He would not be the fearful man he is, if he gave warning before he struck. But, I repeat, there is no occasion for haste. When the war actually begins, we can depart in peace."

"Why then, if not now?"

"For two reasons. First, because while we are in the ranks of his open enemies, his chances for plotting against our lives will be greatly lessened. Secondly, because it has ever been

his policy, in the civil commotions of Mexico, to secure friends on both sides. If left to his own choice, he would prefer our joining your countrymen, so that, in the event of their success, he might have some chance of saving his property on the San Antonio (which he cannot remove) from confiscation. True, he regards this, and will continue to regard it, as a very improbable contingency; but he has grown rich by providing for possibilities, as well as probabilities. He knows that I am not without influence with Lorenzo de Zavala, and he calculates that a man of your courage and energy will acquire a like influence with the American leaders. He will himself probably solicit a commission in the Mexican army, and his request will be granted, for he is well known to Santa Anna, and known to be a soldier of tried courage and capacity. Thus he will have made all the provision it is possible to make for the fortunes of war."

Subsequent events proved how accurately Pedro had calculated, and how well he understood the character of his employer. To Gray, the conclusion arrived at by the old Mexican was not entirely clear; and though he gave his assent to the proposed arrangement, it was with the internal resolution to enter into no engagement that would prevent his leaving the Rancho on an hour's notice. Among the considerations which induced him to remain, was one to which Pedro had not alluded. Whatever Bartolo Piedras might be to others, he had been kind and generous to him. He did not give the Mexican credit for great disinterestedness, but he did give him credit for a disposition to serve, to the utmost of his ability, any one who manifested a like disposition in return. He could not forget that John Allison was indebted to him for a situation that at once secured an independence; and this was a favor he esteemed far more highly than any that could have been rendered to himself. Under all the circumstances, he was induced to believe that the advice of Pedro was as much in

accordance with honorable feeling, as with prudent caution; and but for the galling idea of doing anything from fear of the consequences, he would have been entirely contented to await the time when his services would be actually needed in the cause of freedom and independence.

Upon the return of Piedras, Gray sought an early opportunity to communicate his belief that civil discord was at hand, and to remind his employer that, in that event, he held himself free to join the American side, whenever an organized force was in the field. They were alone upon the beach. It was a dead calm, but the tide was running in, and the waves beat with a low moan upon the sandy shore. Piedras stretched out his hand towards the slumbering deep, as he replied:

"When I found you at San Felipe, not many months ago, everything on the surface of society was as calm and unruffled as yonder sea. The Colonists were satisfied with the Government; or, if the voice of complaint was heard at all, it was like the soft murmur of the tide rolling in upon this shore, and seeming to embrace it in love, rather than in anger. There can be no adequate cause for the mighty change you think has taken place. You must be mistaken."

"I cannot misunderstand the signs I witnessed. The time has certainly been short for a revolution to take root, but resistance to oppression comes naturally to an Anglo-Saxon, and tyranny always finds him prepared."

Bartolo pondered deeply before he replied:

"I can well believe your countrymen capable of almost any rashness; but for a few thousand Squatters, without an army, without vessels, without a treasury, and without munitions, to declare war against a rich and powerful nation, is a madness from which even they will shrink. Depend upon it, there will be no fighting. If there is, we will part as friends, trusting that if the chances of war should bring us into contact, it

ill be under circumstances which will enable us to exchange ind offices, instead of downright blows."

"I hope so," answered Gray. "There will be as many egrets upon my part as upon yours, if the time ever comes hen we shall meet otherwise than as friends. But I cannot ee why you, a citizen of Texas, should not, like Lorenzo de avala, and others of your people, unite with the American a struggle for your mutual rights."

"Let us turn to other themes," was the response. "Upon his one we shall not agree."

And that extraordinary man, passing at once from the ffairs of the world to the beauties of Nature, and pointing to he glowing heavens above them, continued, in a tone of genuine enthusiasm:

"See yonder bank of clouds, with its edging of gold and rimson, gradually superseded by a dark blue, that, in its turn, rows lighter and lighter as the vapor ascends the horizon, ntil the whole presents the appearance of a range of lofty ountains, with a basement of fire and a summit of eternal now. See, too, how lovely are the tints imprinted by the etting sun upon that solitary cloud to the right—shaming the ainbow by their brilliancy, and almost equalling its variety! oes the departing luminary ever paint such pictures on the eavens in your colder clime?"

"Not often. But I have seen there, at times, a loveliness urpassing even that which is above us."

"You will pardon a Mexican for thinking that your national artialities may have influenced your taste. In my youth, I ourneyed with the priest who was my tutor, to Old Spain, nd from thence into Italy. I had read much of the glory of talian sunsets, and the beauty of Italian nights, and I panted o stand upon the Tiber's brink, and feast my soul on all that ad for ages shed enchantment over the painter's pencil, and illed with melody the poet's lyre. But to my thinking, the

atmosphere of the brightest night was dull and hazy compared with that of the Table Lands of Mexico; and the most gorgeous sunset in that clime never equalled that upon which we are now gazing. Rob Italy of her classic recollections, and half the beauties that tourists have celebrated would vanish with them."

Gray listened in amazement. He knew the man before him to be engaged in lawless and desperate enterprises. Pedro had more than hinted at the commission of dark deeds, such as blight the heart, and sting the conscience with remorse. Could such a man be a dreamy enthusiast, and love to linger in lonely places, holding converse with the moon and stars? The question rose to his lips, and was half uttered, before he reflected that it might be offensive. Bartolo answered without the least discomposure:

"That was long ago. Since then, other things have generally occupied my thoughts. Still, the *capacity* for such enjoyment remains. Let me add, too, that, of the pleasures I have gathered in journeying through the world, the sweetest have been those I snatched from Nature. When exhausted by the fierce struggles of our kind, it is very pleasant to go out beneath the pale moon, or the quiet stars, and forget for a time the battles that are passed, as well as those that are to come."

"Forget! Oh, is forgetfulness possible at such a time, and in such companionship? It is precisely then that memory comes to me clothed in her saddest garments."

"Everything is possible, my young friend, to a man of clear head and strong will. Besides, I have the resources of the confessional. When the words of pardon have passed the lips of the representative of God, why should I permit myself to be disturbed by recollections of a deed that has been atoned for and forgiven? When the Church is satisfied, it becomes a simple question of skill between me and the ministers of the

law. If I am detected, I must pay the penalty. If I elude them, I am entitled to the fruits of victory."

The enunciation of this fearful creed produced in the mind of Gray scarcely any of the horror it would have excited in former times. He was already deeply changed. Instead of detestation for the criminal, his feelings partook of admiration for the man whose firm will thus enabled him to say to remorse, "Avaunt — Begone!" Desperate as was his own character— dark and bloody as had been some of his own actions, he had never been able to shake off the principles in which he had been educated; and bitter anguish invariably mingled with all his meditations upon the past. But here stood one who had penetrated to the arcana of crime, while his own footsteps yet lingered on the penetralia, absolutely revelling in the sweetest enjoyments of Nature at the very moment the gloomy record of his life was spread out before him.

They had now turned towards the picketed fence that enclosed the Rancho. Slowly and silently they retraced their steps; the one not caring to disturb the reflections he had awakened—the other too much absorbed in wonder at what he had heard to indulge in conversation. The silence was at length broken by Piedras, who went on as if no interruption had occurred:

"Are you familiar with the Latin tongue?"

"No. My knowledge of it is very limited."

"That is a pity; for, although the great authors of antiquity are now translated into almost every language, much of their beauty is lost in the process. Even now an expression was dwelling on my memory for which there is no adequate translation — '*pabulum acherontis.*' In English, it is generally rendered, 'food for the tomb;' and I have been thinking what fools we are, to be toiling and struggling, fretting and grieving, through a world where all at last is but food for the tomb. Nay, worse; for in the original the words imply more

than the gnawing of the worms upon the carcase in the grave — they typify also the gnawing of a never-dying worm upon the soul through the countless ages of eternity."

"I should not have suspected you of dwelling upon such thoughts. Just now you intimated that you never permitted regret, or remorse, or melancholy, to disturb your reflections."

"Nor do I. It is one thing to look them in the face, and quite another thing to cower at their presence. Even if I was one of those self-torturers, who anticipate the pains of hereafter by invoking them here, the train of thought I have been indulging would not suffice to call up the phantom demons you have mentioned. I look around me, and I find all of my kind engaged in like employments. All alike are in pursuit of ephemeral toys. I am not so weak or so foolish as to murmur because mine is not different from the general doom. But we are nearing the gate, and philosophical reflections in the presence of the cattle (meaning the Peons) who inhabit yonder Rancho, are impossible. Sup with me to-night. I have much to say to Pedro and yourself, which concerns my interests nearly."

On entering the room which had been assigned for his sleeping apartment, Gray found the son of Pepe Benito busily engaged in making a cornstalk fiddle. Paying no attention to the boy, he hung his *sombrero* on the rack where his rifle was suspended, and seated himself upon his couch to think over all he had heard, and ponder on what he was likely to become under such a tutor. Diego stole a glance in the direction of the bed, and saw with surprise, shudder after shudder shake the strong man's frame.

"Is the Señor Gray sick?" he asked, dropping the cornstalk and penknife, and advancing to the side of the bed

"No, Diego. I am well enough."

"Has any one wronged you, Señor?"

"Not lately, nor here."

"Seiior, you saved my life on the Rio Grande, when I thought I had not five seconds to live, and I suspect you have preserved it here, by taking me into your own service, and keeping me constantly about you. Tell me who is your enemy. He shall not trouble you long."

His voice was low and firm, and his countenance resembled that of a young tiger longing for its first taste of blood. Struck by the fierce bearing of the youth, and willing to try him further, Mabry Gray turned upon him an inquiring glance, and said slowly,

"So, Diego, you would strike even Bartolo Piedras to the heart this night, if I bid you?"

"*Si, Señor.*"

"I thank you. Report does not speak very highly of the gratitute of the Mexican race. I am glad to find that you are an exception to the general rule. Some day I may need your services, though not in the way to which you allude. I require no other aid against a known foe than my own right hand. Strike no one on my account. Watch all who come near me, for in this land of anarchy and misrule, treachery has a natural growth."

"If the Señor suspects any one, it is better and surer to strike at once, or let me do it."

"Ay, that is your infernal Mexican policy, and I know not that it is altogether wrong in dealing with such a race. Still, whether right or wrong, it suits not me. I must have proof before I strike, and if you wish to remain in my service, you must follow my example."

"I do wish to remain, Señor, for I can stay nowhere else and live. I only meant to remind you, that when a rattlesnake is crawling near you, there is no prudence in waiting until you see him in his coil."

Gray did not answer, and the boy turned away to resume

his occupation of constructing a miniature violin from the shell and fibres of the cornstalk.

Many days passed, and the conferences of Bartolo, Pedro, and Gray, had been long and frequent. The return of the smuggling vessel was hourly expected, and preparations were making to dispose of her cargo.

"I think," said Piedras, "that you will meet with less difficulty than beset your last venture. The troubles in the interior have caused the withdrawal of all the Lancers from the line of the Rio Grande. The police force of the towns was never worth anything, and now that they are unsupported by the military, will certainly not trouble themselves in the least to watch your movements."

"There is nothing to fear from them," replied Pedro.

"Our chief difficulty arises from the death of Don Estevan, by which we have lost a safe and convenient depôt for the goods."

"That was thought of, and provided for before I left Monterey. I have engaged another Hacienda that will be safe enough, unless great carelessness is manifested, and that is a fault no one will attribute to you."

"Did you obtain proof," asked Gray, "that Don Estevan was really the traitor Pedro suspected."

"Pedro rarely makes a mistake in a matter of importance. I arrived at the Hacienda of Don Estevan suddenly and unannounced. He received me with his wonted courtesy; but I am in the habit of looking below the surface, and I thought I could detect a feeling of uneasiness or restlessness, that I had no difficulty in ascribing to the proper cause. It was late before we retired, for we had much business that was unsettled, and I was anxious to close our accounts. At breakfast, he informed me that he had indispensable business in the city. He added that he could not think of asking me to accompany him, as the fatigue of my long journey, and the loss of sleep the

previous night, must make a day's repose highly desirable. In tones as bland as his own, I assured him that I was not suffering at all from fatigue, or the loss of rest — that I also had business in the city; and as my stay was limited, it was important that it should be attended to without delay. During that day, you may be sure, I never lost sight of him long enough for him to whisper a message to a foot-boy, without my being aware of its purport. Completely baffled, he proposed an early return to the Hacienda. It was my policy to assent to everything he proposed, except to part company; and we rode back conversing by the way upon the incidents of our younger days, and the events in which we had since borne a part. You would have thought he loved me as a brother. Even I began to doubt if I had not wronged him by my suspicions. Upon our arrival at his Hacienda, knowing that other eyes as keen as my own were watching him, I walked at once into the house, and left him to attend to the various domestic duties that necessarily devolve upon the head of such an establishment. Before nightfall, I received certain information that Don Estevan had secretly ordered his horses to be in readiness at four o'clock in the morning. Of course I had no difficulty in arriving at the conclusion that he intended to pay a visit to the political chief of New Leon, while I was slumbering unconsciously beneath his roof. I had gone prepared for every contingency. This very movement had been looked to as possible, and found me prepared to meet it. Fatigue and a slight indisposition were accepted as an excuse for my not supping with him that evening. I sought my pillow at an early hour, and was sleeping soundly when a servant came to announce that his master had been suddenly attacked with violent convulsions. My first care, after entering his chamber, and finding his symptoms exceedingly dangerous, was to dispatch a messenger for a physician of my acquaintance; who, however, only arrived in time to witness the dying

agonies of his patient. The surgeon pronounced his disease congestion of the heart, — and I suppose it was. Thus providentially relieved of a dangerous friend, I opened his escretoire, and took therefrom such papers as might do me an injury in other hands. These were committed to the flames — the others were carefully restored to their places. As an old and intimate friend, it was incumbent on me to play the part of mourner at the celebration of the funeral obsequies. This done, I remained no longer in the vicinity of Monterey than was required to make arrangements for the future transmission of my goods. In regard to that matter, I will give you written directions, which, when you have sufficiently impressed them on your memory, you had better destroy."

"What do you think of Bartolo Piedras, now, Señor?" inquired Pedro, when the conference was ended, and they had retired to the apartment of Gray.

"He is a wonderful man, whom I have never fully comprehended, and do not think I ever shall. Surely," he continued, "he must have known that we understand fully the agency he had in the death of Don Estevan, and yet he repeated the story as calmly and coldly as if he were only recounting the fate of a vicious brute."

"Be you certain, Señor, that he had no intention or desire to deceive us on that point; though with the habitual caution of his whole life, he dropped no word that amounted to a confession of his own share in the deed."

"But why tell us at all? Such dark secrets, it seems to me, had better be locked in the possessor's bosom."

"Perhaps he thought we knew enough already to make any attempt at concealment a folly. Perhaps he wished to give you a warning that his enmity was at all times deadly."

The brow of Gray flushed with sudden anger, and his right hand was carried with a fierce motion to the hilt of his bowie-knife.

"By the Lord, he had better be sparing of his warnings. If I am at any time attacked with sudden illness in this Rancho, it will not be safe for him to approach my bed-side while I have strength enough left to sheathe this good blade in a human carcase."

"There is no occasion for anger, Señor. He means you no harm *now;* and I believe you will live with him in peace, and part from him in friendship. Still, he is a man to be watched and feared."

"Feared!" exclaimed Gray.

"Ay, feared, Señor. However lightly we may value life, all of us have a choice as to the mode of separation between the soul and body. Take a soldier, who would march with an unfaltering step upon certain death on the battle-field — place him in this room — loose three or four vipers, as joint tenants of the chamber — close the door, and leave him in the dark; and my life upon it, in one hour his hair would be hoary with terror. Nay, more: let a lost wretch, who has started to a river's brink for the purpose of self-destruction, meet a hungry panther by the way, and he will take to his heels as quickly as a timid boy. There are things we all fear; and I know of nothing more fearful than a man whose means of vengeance you cannot estimate, and whose hour of striking you cannot guess."

There was a pause of several minutes in the conversation. Pedro walked to the door—looked out—then carefully closing it, returned to the side of his friend.

"Every soul is asleep," he said, "and I shall have no better opportunity of revealing to you, how completely your life has been at his mercy." Pointing to the ceiling, he continued, "do you see that heavy beam running across the whole width of your room?"

Gray answered in the affirmative.

"Now get upon your bed, and examine that part between the girders above it."

Gray did as he was directed, and immediately exclaimed,

"By all that is holy, it is sawed in two at both ends. What keeps it from falling?"

"Mount this," said Pedro, placing a wooden stool on the bed, "and examine for yourself."

"There is a massy iron ring in the block, to which is attached a cable rope, running through another ring in the rafter, and then passing through the wall of the adjoining apartment."

"Come down now, Señor, and listen. Within that room there is another ring, to which the cable is fastened, and the sawed beam is thus kept suspended in its place. It is the store-room, as you know, and Piedras never trusts the key out of his own possession. Suppose he should imagine it to be to his interest to get rid of you, he has only to enter that room while you are asleep — give one blow with a hatchet on the cable rope, and your spirit wings its flight to another world."

Gray turned white with anger and apprehension.

"Great God!" he exclaimed, "has the cold-blooded devil invented this murderous contrivance for my benefit?"

"No, Señor. It was prepared long ago, and for another purpose. It was not *invented* for your benefit, though it is not impossible that it has crossed his mind, that, in certain contingencies, it might be safely used for your destruction. I have known that beam to fall upon the occupant of yonder bed once before, and it might fall again. Guard against such a casualty."

"Assuredly I will. Let us move this bed."

"No, Señor. That would only give him notice that you had discovered his ingenious contrivance. Take this raw-hide thong, pass it through both rings, and fasten it so that if the

rope should be cut, there will still be a support to prevent the beam from falling."

"It is not strong enough."

"Double it, and double it again. The weight of the whole Rancho would hardly break it then."

When this operation was satisfactorily completed, Gray descended from his elevation, with a compressed lip, a flashing eye, and an angry spot upon his cheek.

"I am thinking," he said, "that Señor Piedras is in a fair way to join Don Estevan in purgatory."

"There is no need of that," replied Pedro: "he means you no harm now. But he is a man who may mean harm at any time, and when he does meditate mischief, he leaves the object of his enmity no time for after preparation. I have watched him for ten years, until I think I can read the very thoughts within his bosom. He either loves you better than he ever loved any thing before, or he has some strong motive for watching over your safety. He was nearly crazy, when he thought you had been killed by the Camanches; and he rated me soundly, for permitting you to expose your life so recklessly at Mier. You have nothing to dread from him at this time; yet who can tell how long his good intentions will last?"

"That is it. I can never be certain for a moment that my life is secure. For that very reason, I am tempted to strike at once."

"No human life is ever secure in this world; and it often happens, that those who peril it least are the first to lose it. I have lived with Bartolo Piedras for more than ten years, incurring daily precisely the same danger you now run; and yet I am unharmed. So I believe it will be with you. I only thought it prudent to guard against a possible contingency."

"Well, be it so. He has done me some kindnesses that I do not wish to repay with blood. At any rate, our connection is not likely to last long I hope we may part in peace."

"In my opinion, you will, Señor. And now, good night, or rather, good morning, for it is near day-break."

In ten minutes, Pedro was asleep. Not so with Gray; he had seen and heard many things that night to startle a novice in the ways of the world, and morning found him watching for its coming. The inmates of the Rancho were still slumbering when he went forth, as usual, to attend in person to the wants of his noble steed. Looking seaward, he discovered, through the mists of the early day, the dim outlines of a vessel at anchor, and readily conjectured that the smuggler they were expecting had arrived during the night. Here was a new subject for reflection. Should he go to Monterey, as he knew Bartolo wished and expected, or should he at once depart, and join his countrymen on the Brazos? A few minutes sufficed him to decide in favor of the former course. There would be time enough, as Pedro had suggested, before the struggle actually began, and, in the meantime, he would be acquiring a knowledge of the country which might be eminently useful to the revolutionists. Accordingly, he participated actively in the work of unloading the schooner, and, when it was accomplished, discussed with Piedras all the contingencies that might aid or embarrass the delivery of the goods, with a degree of interest that left no room to suppose he had seriously contemplated refusing to accompany the train. A few days were lost in waiting to get the full advantage of the moon, before he started a second time for Monterey, accompanied by the same troop as formerly. His far-seeing and sagacious principal had rightly predicted that the journey would be made with little comparative difficulty. The goods were safely disposed of; and returning leisurely by a different route, he made minute and accurate observations of the country, from which he derived the full benefit in after years.

CHAPTER IX.

"Is it the thunder's solemn sound
That mutters deep and dread,
Or echoes from the groaning ground,
The warriors' measured tread?
Is it the lightning's quivering glance
That on the thicket streams,
Or do they flash on spear and lance,
The sun's retiring beams?"

ONCE more, and for the last time, Bartolo Piedras and Mustang Gray were seated in the apartment where their former conferences had been held. There were writing materials and a number of papers on the table between them. Piedras had been engaged in casting up his accounts. Looking up from the balance-sheet, he said:

"Your last venture has been equally as profitable as the former. Here," he added, pushing a bag of gold towards Gray, "here is your share of the profits."

"Pardon me, Señor. I am not now in a condition to accept your bounty so willingly as formerly. Then, I looked forward to the probability of rendering you other services that would compensate you for your liberality. Now, I know not what day we may part. You remember I advised you of my determination to join my countrymen, whenever an armed band took the field."

"No matter; it is yours, has been fairly earned, and is not now offered for the purpose of keeping you with me. I paid a visit to San Felipe during your absence, to assure myself of the actual state of affairs. Wild and foolish as I believe it to be, it is nevertheless certain that a wide-spread revolution has

already begun in this Province of Texas. Remembering your former communications, of course I felt that our parting was inevitable. I have also received notice from Pedro Gomez, that he wishes to join the standard of Lorenzo de Zavala, to whom he is indebted for acts of kindness many years ago. I have no right to oppose either his or your inclination, however hard it may be to part with the only two men about me upon whom I can implicitly rely. Before you go, it concerns my own honor that our accounts should be fully settled. You must not leave me under the impression that Bartolo Piedras is a niggard."

"That is a vice I should not have imputed to you in any event. Your whole conduct to me has been the reverse. But tell me, Señor, what news you gathered at San Felipe."

"The Colonists are holding meetings all over the province, in which strong resolutions of resistance to the Federal Government are adopted, and in some parts armed bands are already gathering. On my return, I met a courier at San Patricio, who was the bearer of orders to Colonel Ugartachea, to demand all the cannon in possession of the settlers."

"Then, by the Lord, the struggle is indeed near at hand! If I know anything of the American race, the first attempt to enforce that order will be the signal for battle. They will never disarm in obedience to the mandate of a treacherous tyrant, whose next step would be to drag them like cattle to the slaughter-pen. Peace is impossible. The revolution is begun."

"I fear so, and shall make my dispositions accordingly. When do you propose to depart?"

"To-morrow. I have little preparation to make, and Pedro, I suppose, has not much more."

Bartolo Piedras made no comment upon the suddenness of his departure, and Gray, attributing his silence to a desire that their conversation should terminate, rose to take his leave.

'Your kindness, Señor, emboldens me to make another request. If you can spare the boy Diego, I should like to take him as an attendant."

"If I hesitate," replied the Mexican, "it is on your account. Believe me, he who has once proved a traitor will do so again. Kindness cannot change the nature of the serpent. It is far better to leave him where he is."

Gray was unwilling to leave the youth who had manifested so much willingness to serve him when he believed his life was insecure, and persisted in his request. His renewed application was promptly acceded to, and our hero walked away to communicate the tidings to Diego. The stripling bounded full three feet from the ground when the welcome announcement was made, shouting joyously, "Bueno, Señor; bueno!"

With some difficulty, Gray suppressed his immoderate transports; assuring him that the service before him was no light one, and that he would have to undergo hardships that would tax to the uttermost his slender frame.

"I care not," replied the boy; "I care not, so I can take a cup of chocolate, or a sip of coffee, without trembling for fear that it contains some drug that will put me to sleep for ever. Jesu, Señor, my days and nights have been horrible since that dark night on the Rio Grande, when the gleaming knife of my own father was descending on my bosom."

"Hush, Diego, hush. This is no time or place for such language. Be ready to start by daylight."

"*Si, Señor.*" And then, as Gray passed out of hearing, he muttered to himself, "I love that man. I never loved my father, nor the old hag they call my mother, nor Bartolo Piedras, nor Pedro Gomez; but I love this stranger. Why, I hardly know. He is wretched; that is one reason. Then he treats me like a human being, which no one else ever did; that is another. But that is not all; there is something more. I cannot make it out. I only know I would die to serve him."

The parting with Piedras was friendly, and interspersed with many cordial wishes for each other's welfare and happiness. The Rancho was left behind, and the wide Prairie spread its flowery beauties before them. Rising high in his stirrups, and stretching his hand aloft towards the heavens, Gray gave vent to the feelings that were struggling within him.

"Now, now there is a field of action before me at which I need not blush! Away with the smuggler's dark rides and the smuggler's brawls! Beneath the banner of freedom, in the broad light of day, there are deeds to be performed which my father's warrior spirit shall note with pride and satisfaction."

In the first intoxication of recovered self-respect, he forgot the presence of his companions, and bounded forward on his way at a rate of speed to which their less sinewy animals were with difficulty urged. On the route they frequently met Couriers hurrying southward, and doubted not that they were bearing dispatches from the Mexican officers to the central government. Once or twice he was strongly tempted to stop these gentry, and relieve them of the papers they carried. His almost total ignorance of the point at which the revolution had arrived, made such a proceeding so imprudent and hazardous that it was reluctantly abandoned. The answers he received to the few questions he propounded he knew could not be relied on, and he only continued to put them for the purpose of marking any variation in their statements.

They arrived at San Felipe de Austin about noon, and found the town deserted by the greater part of the male inhabitants, who had gone to attend a muster in the vicinity. Josefa received them with genuine affection at the gate of the Posada — threw her large fat arms around Gray, pressed him to her bosom, and imprinted kiss after kiss upon his cheek. To Pedro she extended a cordial welcome; patted Diego on

the head, and invited them to enter. Gray's impatience scarcely allowed him to wait until the first friendly greetings were over, before he began questioning Josefa as to the temper of the Colonists, and the nature and extent of their preparations for resistance. She knew little, she said, except that there were daily meetings and musterings, and that her husband was absent from home three-fourths of his time in attendance on them.

"He can tell you all about it," she added, "when he returns this evening. You must wait until then."

Becoming a questioner in turn, she extracted by degrees everything that had befallen him since his last visit to San Felipe. She had heard a rumor of the sudden death of Don Estevan Llano, and upon that point questioned him closely. His account was clothed in such guarded language, that it was impossible she could infer his own convictions of the share her brother had in it. If his object was to spare her feelings, he might have saved himself the trouble, for she at once said,

"Ah! that was Bartolo's work. I never knew anything to live long that had once crossed his path. You are well rid of him, *mi amigo*, for though I do believe he would have cut off his left hand before he would have harmed a hair of your head, still it is dangerous playing with a tiger, even if it be a caged one."

Gray replied, that whatever might be the faults of Piedras, he had found no cause to doubt his friendly intentions towards himself, and that even in parting with him, he had manifested a degree of liberality he had no right to anticipate.

"He is your brother too, my kind hostess, and let us therefore try and forget all but the good points of his character."

In such conversation the evening was passed, until Saxon, John Allison, and others of Gray's acquaintances, returned from the military training, to which the whole body of the Texan people had voluntarily subjected themselves. From

repeated conversations with the settlers, he obtained full information of their grievances, and learned to his gratification, that the whole people of the country had resolved to win independence, or a grave.

Instead of giving the details of those conversations, it will be more satisfactory to the reader, to condense them into a connected history of the times.

About the first of September 1835, Stephen F. Austin returned from his long incarceration in Mexico. Previous to his arrival, the first steps towards a revolution had been taken. Rusk, Archer, Lamar, the two Whartons, and others, assembled their countrymen in public meetings, and addressed them in the determined language of men who knew their rights, and were resolved to maintain them. The many petty annoyances to which they were subjected, in the mere wantonness of tyranny, were recounted in fervid strains, and then a darker picture was drawn of the deliberate schemes, on the part of the federal government, to destroy every vestige of freedom in the land. They were reminded that the Mexican congress, under the dictation of Santa Anna, had abrogated the constitution of 1824—that they had abolished the state governments, and converted them into mere dependencies on the federal head; and finally that, in Texas, they openly boasted of their intention to establish Custom-Houses, and quarter troops, wherever it was judged expedient to overawe the inhabitants. The seeds of the revolution thus sown, were ripened into a harvest, upon the return of the Empressario. The address to his countrymen, which he soon afterwards prepared, and published, is as remarkable for the calmness of its tone, as for the simplicity and firmness of its language. In that address, after reciting the objects of his mission, he says,

"Many months passed away, and nothing was done with the petition, except to refer it to a committee of Congress, where it slept, and was likely to sleep. I finally urged the

just and constitutional right of Texas to become a State in the most pressing manner, as I believed it to be my duty to do; representing, also, the good policy of this measure, owing to the almost total want of local government of any kind, the absolute want of a Judiciary, the absolute impossibility of being governed any longer by Coahuila (for three-fourths of the Legislature were from there), and the consequent anarchy and discontent that existed in Texas."

The representations, the arguments and entreaties of Col. Austin were of no avail; Santa Anna had fixed upon his line of action, and he was not to be turned from it at the prayer of a distant State, whose strength, resources, and spirit, he alike undervalued. Wearied and disgusted by long delays, despairing of any rightful action, and believing his presence at home of more importance to the people he came to represent, Col. Austin departed from the city on his return to Texas. A revolution was then raging in several parts of Mexico, and it did not suit the purposes of the Dictator to permit the return of a man whose demands he had scorned, and whose friendship he felt that he had forfeited. The narrative continues:

"I was arrested at Saltillo, two hundred leagues from Mexico, taken back to the city, and imprisoned for one year — three months of that time in solitary confinement, without books or writing materials, in a dark dungeon of the former Inquisition prison. At the end of the year I was released from confinement, but detained six months in the city on heavy bail. It was nine months after my arrival before I was officially informed of the charges against me, or furnished with a copy of them. The constitutional requisites were not observed; my constitutional rights as a citizen were violated; the people of Texas were outraged by this treatment of their Commissioner, and their respectful, humble, and just petition disregarded."

The publication of this Address incensed to fire the already

excited and indignant Texans. A public dinner was tendered to Col. Austin at Brazoria. On the eighth of September, at that place, he addressed a large concourse of the Colonists, pointing out the dangers that threatened Texas, and earnestly urging "a general consultation of the people."

His suggestions were promptly adopted. Committees of Safety were appointed, and the fifteenth day of October fixed upon as the time for the general assembling of the people. Before that time, however, Gen. Coas, with four hundred additional troops, arrived at San Antonio de Bexar. He avowed his intention to place the entire country under military rule, and demanded that the Texans should surrender Lorenzo de Zavala, to be tried as a traitor. The action of the Texans was correspondingly hastened by these proceedings. Stephen F. Austin, as Chairman of the Committee of Safety for the jurisdiction of Austin, issued a circular on the nineteenth of September, in which he declared: "War is our only resource. There is no other remedy. We must defend our rights, ourselves, and our country, by force of arms."

The eagerness of Mustang Gray to engage in active service was soon gratified. A company of volunteers was forming in San Felipe to assist their brethren of Gonzales, against which place it was understood that Ugartachea was marching a strong body of troops, with the intention of taking by force the piece of artillery in the possession of the citizens. Leaving Pedro to seek for Zavala, with whom he was anxious to communicate before committing himself irretrievably, Gray enrolled his own name with the little band of daring patriots, and took up the line of march for that place, which was destined soon to become the Lexington of Texas. Towards the last of September, Castonado, with two hundred soldiers, forming part of the command of Ugartachea, arrived on the bank of the river opposite to Gonzales, and sent a messenger to demand the surrender of the cannon. At that time there were but eighteen

men in the town, under the command of Capt. Albert Martin. To gain time, he replied that the Alcalde was out of town, and that no one could take the responsibility of delivering the cannon until his return. As soon as the messenger had departed with his answer, Capt. Martin moved his scanty troop down to the ford, determined to dispute the passage to the last against every odds.

The next day, the Mexicans made one or two feints at the ford, and at the ferry, but there was no serious attempt to cross. In the meantime, small parties of Americans were dropping in from different points on the Colorado and the Brasos; until their numbers swelled to one hundred and sixty-eight men. An election for field-officers was held, when John H. Moore was elected Colonel, and J. W. E. Wallace Lieutenant-Colonel. Finding that the enemy had no disposition to begin the battle, Col. Moore determined to cross the river, and attack him in his camp, which was upon a high mound in the Prairie, half a mile from the ferry. The passage was effected during the prevalence of a dense fog, before daybreak, on the morning of the first of October. The fog which had aided them in crossing the stream, now proved a serious inconvenience. It was impossible to ascertain exactly the enemy's position, and considerable time was lost in waiting for it to disperse. Some firing between the advanced guard of the Americans, and a picket guard of the Mexicans, apprised Castonado of the intended attack: thereupon he left the place of his encampment, and taking up a more eligible position, formed in order of battle. The fog disappearing before the rays of the rising Sun, Col. Moore advanced to within three hundred and fifty yards of the enemy, and likewise formed in order of battle. A parley was sounded, which however resulted in nothing, and the two commanders returned to their respective lines to prepare for battle. The action began by the discharge of a piece of artillery on the part of the Colonists —

This was followed by an order to advance. The Mexicans did not wait to receive them, but broke and fled in disgraceful confusion over the Prairie, before the Texans had come within rifle range. To pursue with the infantry would have been useless, and Col. Moore halted his men on the ground lately occupied by the enemy. The few who were mounted, (including Mustang Gray,) followed closely upon the heels of the fugitives. The strength and speed of his horse, soon carried him far ahead of his comrades. An unfortunate wretch, who had fallen considerably behind in the race, perceiving that in a bound or two more he must be overtaken, threw himself upon the ground, to avoid the sweep of the keen sabre in the hand of his pursuer. A slight motion of the bridle hand, was enough to direct the hoof of the iron-grey steed upon his prostrate form. A sharp cry of agony followed, and the spirit took its departure from the mangled body. Another attempted to wheel, and defend himself with his escopeta. Rising in his stirrups, so as to give full force to the blow, the blade of the American was driven by an arm of iron exactly on the point where the neck and shoulders join, and the Mexican rolled on the Prairie, dyeing the green grass around, with a crimson fluid. By this time the Mexicans had become aware that the pursuit was conducted by a mere handful of their foes. A squad of them halted—formed in regular order, and presented their escopetas. With a yell that more resembled the cry of a hungry panther than any human sound, Gray rushed upon them. He was received by an irregular volley, so ill directed that only one ball grazed his side, while his own sabre was crimsomed to the hilt, as he broke unharmed through the shattered line. Here he was opposed by a stronger body, armed with muskets and bayonets, which he instantly perceived it would be madness to charge. In such emergencies, thought flashes like lightning through the brain. So sudden is its coming, so rapid are its combinations, that it is doubtful

whether instinct be not its proper name. Another bound, and he would have been too near to retreat; but even while the horse's forefeet were in the air, the bridle was drawn hard, and the animal wheeled backwards as if on a pivot. A considerable circuit removed him from the danger of a direct fire, and in a few minutes he rejoined his comrades, who were slaughtering the fugitives he had passed in his headlong career. All that could be effected had been done. The main body were too far off to support them, and the Mexicans, though still retreating, were no longer scattered here and there, but formed in regular order, with a rear guard strong enough to protect them. A loud shout for "Texas and liberty," rang over the plains, and the little party galloped back to the position occupied by Col. Moore. In his precipitate flight, the enemy had abandoned his baggage, which fell into the hands of the volunteers, who marched into Gonzales without the loss of a single man, in high spirits at the result of their first encounter with the myrmidons of the oppressor.

Intelligence of this affair was dispatched to Col. Austin by express, who lost no time in transmitting it to every town in the province. In less than ten days, the force at Gonzales had swelled to more than five hundred men, and on the muster rolls appeared such names as Rusk, Travis, Fannin, Bowie, Archer, and a hundred others, who have since won eternal fame.

At the period of which we write, Goliad and San Antonio de Bexar were the keys of Texas. An enemy in possession of these points could strike when and where he pleased; or, by adopting a slower policy, tire out the Colonists, and compel them from exhaustion to submit to any terms he might dictate. Santa Anna was well aware of their importance, and had filled them with strong garrisons, well supplied with artillery. The Texans, who were equally alive to the absolute necessity of obtaining possession of these two points, elected Stephen F.

Austin commander-in-Chief, and sent messengers to every settlement, urgently calling for volunteers to join him at once before the Mexican garrisons could be reinforced. While waiting for the expected succors, Gen. Austin received information that a body of the enemy had occupied Victoria, and were committing many depredations in the neighborhood. Col. B. F Smith, in command of a detachment of eighty men, was ordered to drive them from the place. Upon his arrival in the town, he found that it had been evacuated the preceding day, the enemy retreating towards Goliad, pursued by about forty planters from the neighborhood of Matagorda, under Lieut. Collingsworth. Fearing that this small band might be overwhelmed by superior numbers, he pressed rapidly on in the wake of the daring patriots. Within eight miles of Goliad, he selected a suitable place for an encampment, and sent out two of his soldiers to reconnoitre the town, and obtain what information they could of Collingsworth. The scouts did not return; and early on the following morning, he put his troops in motion, determined to attack the place, if for no other purpose than to ascertain its actual strength. As he approached the town, Collingsworth rode out to meet him; and he learned to his surprise that the youthful hero had stormed the fortress some ten hours before, capturing the whole garrison, five hundred muskets and carbines, as many lances, two brass pieces of artillery, and a large amount of provisions and ammunition.

"You have cheated me out of a laurel, my boy," said the veteran, laying his hand on the shoulder of his youthful friend. "But it could not bloom on a nobler brow than that it now adorns."

After entering the town, and inspecting the fortifications, Col. Smith directed Collingsworth to collect such additional volunteers as he could in the vicinity, and maintain the post he had so gallantly won to the last extremity. Aware that an attack upon San Antonio might be daily looked for, the indefatigable soldier allowed only a brief rest to refresh his own

men and horses, before he was again in the saddle on his return to the head-quarters of the "army of the people."

Formed two abreast, the company rode at a quick though steady pace towards San Felipe.

"What is the matter?" inquired the light-hearted frontiersman, who was riding by the side of Gray. "What are you moping about? We are going to a wedding, man, not to a funeral."

"I was thinking," replied Gray, "that I would give my left hand to have been with Collingsworth last night."

"Bah! We shall beat that at San Antonio."

"That may be captured, too, before we arrive."

"Well, if it is, we shall have plenty of other chances to get our brains knocked out before this war is over. You may be tolerably sure that Santa Anna will gorge us with blood before he surrenders as rich a province as this to our sole keeping."

Gray made no direct reply, but questioned his comrade as to the strength of the Alamo (which he had never seen), and the other fortifications about San Antonio. This was a subject with which the old hunter was familiar, and upon which he had no objection to dwell; so that there was no flagging of the conversation during the remainder of the day.

John Allison and Saxon had been among the first to obey Austin's call for volunteers; and Gray found them in the camp on his return, almost as eager as himself for the fray. In this they were destined for some time yet to be disappointed. Notwithstanding the reinforcements he had received, the General still thought himself too weak to attack Cos in his intrenchments; and it was not until the twentieth of October that he took up a position on the Salado creek, five miles from Bexar. On the twenty-eighth, an advanced party under Fannin and Bowie, amounting to ninety-two men, were attacked by about four hundred of the Mexican garrison, at the Mission of Concepcion, a mile and a half from Bexar. After a desperate

fight of several hours' duration, the Mexicans were defeated with the loss of one piece of artillery, sixty-seven killed, and thirty or forty wounded. The cool and dauntless courage exhibited by Gray during this action, attracted the attention of Bowie, who approached him when the battle was over, and said,

"You have won your spurs nobly, Sir, and shall have a commission, if the word of Jim Bowie is worth anything among the men of the border."

"Thank you, Colonel, thank you. But I have too little experience as yet to be trusted with a commission. After a while, I may claim your promise."

"It shall be redeemed, Sir. If God spares me, it shall be redeemed."

Alas! the doom of the high-hearted and chivalrous soldier was already written. A few weeks later, that manly form was food for the vultures.

Subsequent events clearly proved, that if General Austin had marched upon San Antonio immediately after the battle of Concepcion, the town and fortress might have been easily captured. The leading trait of his character was prudence. He had none of that impetuosity which often snatches a victory from the very jaws of fate. Arriving on the field of Concepcion an hour after the battle, he hesitated to act upon his own responsibility, and called a council of war. The council, probably knowing the bias of their leader, advised against an attack; and thus a glorious opportunity was thrown away. The great Lord Clive, in the decline of his life, remarked, that he had never called but one council of war during the whole of his career, and that, if he had followed the advice of that one, India would have been lost to Great Britain. A commander fit to lead armies should trust to the suggestions of his own genius, rather than the advice of those who are confessedly his inferiors. In all history, there is but one great

military leader who can be shown to have been materially benefited by councils of war. That one was George Washington. In his case, too, it must be borne in mind, that his own opinions were always carefully shrouded from his subordinates. He listened attentively to all they had to say, weighed every word, and then acted according to the dictates of his own judgment.

On the 13th of November, the "Consultation of Texas" relieved General Austin from his duties in the field, and appointed him Commissioner to the United States. The fiery Burleson took his place as Commander of the army before Bexar. More stirring events were now about to be witnessed. The lion-hearted Milam arrived from Goliad, and obtained permission from the General to beat up for recruits to storm the Alamo. Three hundred hardy sons of the forest and the prairie answered to his call. Three hundred such as stood in the pass of Thermopylæ, and rolled back the myriads of the Persian host. On the 5th of December, this patriot band entered the suburbs of San Antonio, General Burleson taking up a position at the old mills near the town, to support them, if necessary. They were met by a shower of grape and musketry, which was sustained with a coolness that would have done honor to Napoleon's Guard. One by one the barricades and fortified houses of the enemy were stormed and taken. Through four days the murderous conflict raged. Through four days, without shrinking, the citizen-soldiers breasted the tempest of death. The fifth witnessed the extraordinary spectacle of 1500 regular troops, well armed, and supplied with all the munitions of war, driven in disgrace before 300 badly-armed militia, and compelled to shut themselves up within the stone walls of the Alamo.

On the same day (December 9th), General Cos sent out a messenger with propositions to surrender. On the 10th, articles of capitulation were signed on both sides, and the last

strong-hold of Santa Anna in Texas was given up to the Patriots. But the glory of the achievement was saddened by the sacrifice at which it was obtained. On the third day, the glorious Milam had fallen with a bullet through his head, and some of the best and bravest of that heroic band were sleeping with their leader.

Mustang Gray, who had borne his part throughout all the hard fighting in San Antonio, was about to be transferred to another field, for which his previous training had eminently fitted him. Great as had been the successes of the republican arms, the leaders of the revolution knew full well that the struggle had only begun, and that the advantages thus far gained would serve rather to exasperate than to intimidate their foes. Santa Anna had quelled the revolution in Zacatecas, and none doubted that, with the early spring, he would throw an overwhelming force upon Texas. In this state of the case, it was of the highest importance to obtain every possible information of the enemy's movements and intentions. How that information could be obtained, was a question of very difficult solution. The Mexican forces had entirely evacuated Texas. Not a solitary soldier remained. It was clear that any intelligence more reliable than common rumor must be sought beyond the Rio Grande; and for an American to show himself in that region was supposed to be equivalent to signing his own death-warrant. Again and again the Provisional Governor revolved the subject in his mind. Time after time he consulted his council and the superior officers of the army. A dozen schemes were suggested, discussed, and abandoned. It was certain that, long before Santa Anna appeared in the field, he would send Couriers to the officers stationed in the various towns along the line of the river, with instructions when and where to assemble, and what preparations to make. To intercept one of these Couriers, and capture his dispatches, was the simple and obvious mode of obtaining what they

sought. But who was to undertake it? Gray's former residence at Corpus Christi — his familiarity with the country between that and Monterey — his desperate courage, and his unsurpassed horsemanship, pointed him out as the agent to whom the dangerous task could be most properly confided. Called into the presence of the Governor, the wishes of the authorities were explained to him, and the dangers of the service frankly stated. He was then asked if, with three or four comrades, he was willing to undertake it.

"I know," he replied, "what danger I shall have to encounter, better than your Excellency; and knowing it, I answer that I will do your bidding cheerfully; but not with three or four comrades. That force is too small for resistance, and too large for secresy and safety. Give me one companion, of my own selection, and you may rely with some confidence on reading the dispatches of the Dictator within the month."

"Perhaps you are right. At all events, you shall have your wish. Who do you take with you?"

"Pedro Gomez."

"A Mexican!"

"Yes, your Excellency; but one who knows the country better than I do, and who I verily believe would fight the devil himself in my company."

"Well, the risk is yours, and I will not question the propriety of your choice. Can you start to-morrow?"

"To-day."

"Then God bless you! With hearts and arms like yours among her sons, it will be hard, indeed, if Texas does not achieve her independence."

"I hope so, and I believe so," replied Gray, grasping the extended hand of the Governor; and then added, "of one thing I am *certain:* whenever fetters are riveted on Texas, this heart will be cold and still, and this arm too stiff to feel the weight of the shackles."

Thus they parted; the one believing that the chances were ninety in a hundred they would never meet again — the other full of hope and confidence in the successful accomplishment of the dangerous service he had voluntarily undertaken.

CHAPTER X.

"But he who stems a stream with sand,
And fetters flame with flaxen band,
Has yet a harder task to prove —
By stern resolve, to conquer love.'

AGAIN upon the wide Prairie, where the free winds blow unobstructed, and the moon and the stars shed their loveliest light! Again upon the broad *land-ocean*, where the only billows are the waving grass and the bending flowers, and the only ships are the wild deer and the wild horse, coursing over the sweet-scented plain! Again upon the vast solitudes that had become to him a cherished home, the spirits of Gray rose to the highest pitch, and the blood leaped in wilder currents from his beating heart. The fresh breeze, laden with the odors of a thousand flowers, swelled to rapture his exulting thoughts, and clear and high pealed the notes of a song he had loved in his earlier days:

"Some love to roam
O'er the dark sea-foam,
Where the shrill winds whistle free;
But a chosen band
On a prairie land,
And a life on the plains for me."

"I have never seen you so light-hearted before, Señor," said Pedro, when the last note of the first verse had died

away; "and if I were a believer in omens, I should fear that this extraordinary change boded no good to our enterprise."

"Pshaw! Pedro; it is easy enough to account for upon natural principles. There is much in this thing of fighting for liberty; of risking life and fortune, that a people may be free; of striking the shackles from the limbs of the oppressed, and bidding them stand up and look the oppressor in the face. There is much in all this to drive away present care, and the memory of former sorrow. If this war lasts a twelvemonth, I shall be the gayest among you."

It seemed that he wished to hear no reply, for the song was renewed in a full rich voice, that Pedro thought he had never heard equalled.

"I knew not, Señor, that you sang so admirably," was the comment of the Mexican, when the song was ended. "I must teach you some Spanish love ditties. If you sing them as sweetly, and we should be so unfortunate as to get into trouble, there is not a Senorita in all Mexico who hears them, that will not risk a great deal to free us from confinement."

"Well, Pedro, you may begin your lessons now, for I was never in a better mood."

It was a strange spectacle — these two men to whom danger and death were familiar acquaintances — who were now bent upon an adventure full of peril to themselves, and which, terminate as it might, was almost certain to be stained with blood — instead of anxious conference upon the stern realities before them, beguiling the time with the soft melodies which had echoed through the luxurious halls of the Alhambra, and mingled with the tinkling notes of the guitar in the sweetest bowers of Spain. Who can explain the seeming inconsistency? Who can read the dark riddle of humanity? Take a boy, or a woman, whose sight has never been seared by scenes of carnage, to a theatre, and the deepest tragedies are those they love the best. Wait a little longer until that boy has hardened

into manhood, and become a bloody actor on a real stage, and he will turn with impatience from the plays that enchanted his boyhood, while he gives delighted attention to the broadest comedy. Perhaps it is because the reality so far exceeds its mimic representation, that the latter is cold and dull to one who is familiar with the former. Perhaps it is a struggle to drive away the shadows that bloodshed never fails to leave behind. But be it what it may, whoever looks upon the world with an observant eye, can not fail to note that the wildest revelry is often the companion of the darkest deeds, and the heart that is lightest to-day will be shaken by the deadliest passions to-morrow.

The long ride to the Rio Grande was accomplished without meeting a human being on the way, and our two adventurers found themselves in the deserted huts of Pepe Benito.

In Northern Mexico, government dispatches, as well as private correspondence, were invariably transmitted by couriers. For the protection of these couriers, each town was required to furnish an armed escort to a certain distance beyond its limits, where they were met and relieved by the escort from another place. A knowledge of this determined the plan adopted by Gray and Pedro; which was to cross the river, and proceed along by-paths to a point about half-way between China and Monterey, where a little stream crossed the main-road, and a dense thicket of chaparal afforded a convenient shelter for themselves and their horses. This, also, was the point of meeting between the escort from Monterey and the escort from China; when the former turned back, and the couriers proceeded under the protection of the latter. Here they did not doubt that something would turn up, sooner or later, to enable them to accomplish their purpose. The horses were hidden in the thicket — Pedro remained to watch them, and Mustang Gray crawled as near as he dared to the main-road, to note everything that passed.

For several days Courier after Courier went by, but they wore no Government badge, and were, moreover, so strongly guarded that all idea of molesting them was abandoned as hopeless. At length Gray was delighted by seeing the escort from Monterey approaching considerably in advance of the time for that from China to arrive. The officer in command halted his troop, without dismounting, at the little stream — watered his horses, and telling the Courier there was no danger, as the troop that was to meet him must be near at hand, bade him proceed on his way. Now was the golden opportunity. With the quick and noiseless motion of the serpent, Gray regained his horse. Telling Pedro to mount and follow, he skirted the thicket in a direction parallel with the road along which the courier was travelling. This position was maintained until he judged the escort from Monterey were entirely out of sight, when he wheeled his horse into the road, and put him at once to his utmost speed. The clatter of horses' hoofs behind him was the first notice the Mexican received of his danger. A hasty glance backwards was followed by a busy application of spur and *quirt*, which proved that he by no means undervalued the importance of speed to his personal safety. For more than half a mile the race was continued on nearly equal terms. There, however, the road entered a low, marshy ground, in which the superior strength of the American horse told rapidly, and he soon bore his master alongside of the fugitive. The heavy rifle-barrel in the hand of Gray was swung aloft — it descended, driven by the full force of his sinewy arm, and hurled the luckless Courier lifeless from the saddle. Instantly changing the gun to his left hand, he seized the bridle of the masterless steed, and reining him up as quick as the speed at which he was going would admit of, he returned to the still quivering body just as Pedro had alighted by its side.

"Search him well, Pedro," he said, "while I make an inspection of his saddle and saddle-bags."

Both operations were expeditiously performed.

"Have you got everything that was upon him?" asked Gray, who had not approached the body since its fall.

"Everything, Señor."

"Is he certainly dead?"

"Dead! Why his brains are scattered for six feet in every direction around."

"Well, then, I suppose we may count him dead, though the proof is not entirely clear; for I have seen a thousand Greasers living in excellent health, without a particle of brains."

At this period of time the delayed escort appeared in sight, moving slowly and carelessly along the road. A quarter of a mile to the right there was a dense thicket, through which ran a bridle-path, that our adventurers had explored on former occasions. Putting their horses into an easy gallop, they made for the thicket, which extended for miles towards the Rio Grande, and into which it was almost certain the Mexican Lancers would not follow. The escort, who had now caught sight of them, rode furiously in pursuit. At the entrance to the bushes Gray halted, and facing the foe, waited until the foremost pursuer was within eighty yards. The noble animal he bestrode, accustomed to obey the lightest wish of his master, stood as still and rigid as if carved from the solid granite. There was a bright flash, succeeded by a quick, sharp report —the bullet sped to its mark, and a lifeless body cumbered the plain. With a defiant yell Mustang Gray wheeled his horse, and galloped on the track of his comrade. As they had anticipated, no pursuit was attempted through the thorny bushes; but, calculating that messengers would be dispatched to every point where they could be intercepted, the two scouts rode on at the fastest pace their horses would bear, never pausing for rest or refreshment, until they were again upon the northern bank of the Rio Grande. Here they killed a deer from a herd that was grazing on the plain, and, after

feasting on the carcase, erected a scaffold of green twigs, cut a portion of the flesh into thin strips, and spread it on the low scaffolding, over a thick smoke, to dry, while they stretched themselves upon the long grass to enjoy that repose their wearied frames so much required. It was in the early morning when they resigned themselves to sleep, and the sun was near its junction with the western ocean before the drowsy god lifted his leaden hand from their eyes. There was no difference between the day and the night to the wanderers on that wild border, except so far as the one, or the other, was more propitious to the object in view. Invigorated by their long repose, they were soon speeding northward over a country in which the traveller could never feel himself entirely secure for an hour at a time. With admirable skill all the dangers of the route were avoided, and the papers they carried safely delivered to the Provisional Governor of Texas. These proved to be of more importance than either of them anticipated. They contained full directions as to the number and particular description of troops to be mustered—the points at which they were to rendezvous—the transportation required—the munitions and supplies to be collected—together with all the other requisites for the efficiency of a large army in the coming campaign. Some of them were written in the Dictator's own hand, and announced his purpose to assume the command in person early in February.

"I am coming," he said, "not to inflict a merciful chastisement upon a people who, deceived by the misrepresentations of false leaders, have, in a moment of excitement, rebelled against the parental authority; but to conquer and exterminate a turbulent and rebellious race, who, from the first moment of their arrival in the country, have lost no opportunity of disturbing the peace of the Government to whose hospitality they are indebted for the homes they occupy. From the Rio Grande to the Sabine, not one American intruder shall be left; and if

any Mexican has been so imprudent or so wicked as to unite his fortunes with theirs, he can only hope to escape a traitor's doom by early and unconditional submission to the justly offended authorities of his native land."

A dark frown gathered upon the brow of the Governor, as this butcher epistle was read aloud by his secretary.

"His hospitality!" he exclaimed bitterly. "Well, I suppose we ought to be very thankful for the hospitality that allowed us to shed our best blood in his cause, and the magnanimity that did not interfere to prevent us from defending this territory from the savages, who would have depopulated it but for American rifles. Let him come! Unless I am mistaken, we will teach him the only lesson by which usurpers ever profit." He rose, and paced the room with his arms behind him, and his eyes bent upon the floor. "I dislike," at length he said to Gray, "to ask more of a man who has already done so much; but messengers are scarce, and it is of the utmost importance that the contents of some of these papers should be widely spread through Texas. Are you too much fatigued to bear copies to Victoria and Goliad?"

There was a smile upon Gray's visage, as, stretching forth an arm on which the muscles played and worked like living cords, he proudly replied:

"Fatigue and I have been so seldom acquainted, that I have sometimes doubted whether these sinews were not made of tempered steel. Yet your Excellency must remember I have but one horse; and he has been so hardly used of late, that he requires some repose."

"You shall have my own. Where shall I send him when the papers are prepared?"

"To the Posada of Josefa Saxon. Her husband is now in the Alamo; where, in plain truth, I should like to be myself. But your Excellency's wishes shall be obeyed."

A cordial "good-bye" terminated the interview, and Gray

walked to the house of John Allison, to communicate the intelligence he had gathered, and urge the removal of the property John had accumulated to Nacogdoches, if not beyond the Sabine. The western settlements, he reasoned, must be desolated. The war could not be waged on the frontier, since there the overwhelming force of the invader would be fresh and undivided. The port of Copano was open to him, from which all his supplies might be drawn. There, too, the wide plains afforded every facility for the operations of cavalry and artillery; in which arms the Texans were wofully deficient. A war of posts would be worse. Goliad and the Alamo were the only tenable fortresses. It was true, he said, that if these points could be sufficiently garrisoned and provisioned, and a respectable army at the same time maintained in the field, no enemy would dare to cross the San Antonio. But, unfortunately, Texas had neither the men nor the provisions. The little garrisons already in them would probably be withdrawn; or if they were not, they could not hope to effect anything more than give a temporary check to a well-appointed force.

John Allison listened to a course of reasoning he could not controvert, and then said gloomily,

"You seem to have little hope of victory in the struggle."

"Quite the contrary. I am as certain that we shall triumph in the end, as that I am now living to say it. We have only to fall back as he advances, drive the cattle before us, and destroy the provisions we cannot remove. His army will grow weaker daily, from the necessity of leaving garrisons in the towns he may occupy; while the nearer we approach the eastern boundary, the greater will be the probability of receiving reinforcements of volunteers from the United States. After a while, too, the scarcity of provisions will compel him to divide his army into columns, when they may be attacked and destroyed in detail."

The policy thus marked out was afterwards actually pursued

by Sam Houston; and though strongly opposed by Travis, Fannin, and other glorious leaders of the revolution, its eventual success completely vindicated its adoption.

It required little further persuasion to induce John Allison to adopt the advice of his friend. His partners were likewise satisfied that it was the only method of saving their goods from plunder, or the flames. Gray's next care was to urge the same arguments upon Josefa, and persuade her to follow an example he felt satisfied every prudent citizen would imitate. Here his eloquence was unavailing.

"No," she said. "My husband is in the Alamo; when I hear that it has fallen, and he is dead, I may fly. Until then, I shall remain where I am."

Finding that it would be useless to urge her more, he requested her to pack up a small quantity of salt and some dried beef for his journey, while he employed himself in examining and cleaning his arms. In another hour he was alone upon the Prairie, having left Pedro to watch over and protect Josefa and her children, in the event any of the accidents incident to troubled times should render it necessary.

We must leave our hero for a time, to recall some of the historical recollections of that eventful period. At the very time Santa Anna was making the most formidable preparations — when he was hurrying regiment after regiment of veteran troops to the Rio Grande, Col. F. W. Johnson conceived the daring project of carrying the war into the enemy's country. He had doubtless consulted with Demit, then commanding at Goliad, and with Fannin, as both of them were certainly committed to the scheme; and the probability is, that at one time, it met with favor from the Provisional Government. To understand the desperate hardihood of the movement, it is necessary to remember that Matamoras, the intended point of attack, contained a population of twenty thousand souls — that a large force was collected in it, abundantly supplied with artil-

lery and all the munitions of war — that the towns above it were swarming with men whom the Dictator was every day marching to the line of the Rio Grande — a line which had thus become so strong, that, two months afterwards, he was able to move from it upon Texas with an army of ten thousand chosen men. On the other hand, Texas never mustered under one banner a force exceeding a thousand men. The whole militia, scattered over her vast domain, including the volunteers from the United States, did not number four thousand. Goliad was captured by forty men. The battle of Concepcion was won by less than a hundred. San Antonio was stormed by three hundred. Ward had about one hundred and fifty at the Mission. Fannin had two hundred and seventy-five on the Prairie, between the San Antonio and the Coleto; and Sam Houston seven hundred at the crowning victory of San Jacinto. It is clear, therefore, that Col. Johnson could not have calculated upon raising more than six or eight hundred men for his daring expedition. This fact so fully illustrates the character of the races, that the subsequent successes which attended the American arms, when opposed to Mexican troops, cease to be a matter of wonder. The twenty-seventh of January was the day fixed for the commencement of the march from San Patricio. The dispatches intercepted by Gray revealed a state of things that compelled the Provisional Governor to issue orders to Col. Johnson to abandon the movement. The failure of two subsequent expeditions (that to Santa Fé, and to Mier), against much less formidable odds, proves that this one also must have ended in defeat and disaster; but at that time, it was difficult to impress upon the people a just idea of the strength of their enemy, or their own inability to accomplish impossibilities. The ease with which they had triumphed over the Mexican soldiery in their first encounters, had imparted an over-confidence in themselves, from which the

most melancholy consequences were soon to flow. That confidence led them to despise the danger by which they were threatened, and to neglect the concentration of a sufficient force at any one point to make headway against the invaders. The consequence was, that, in the first month of the war, six hundred of the bravest defenders of Texas were cut to pieces in detail, at the very time their services were invaluable to the young Republic. Had the troops at Goliad and San Antonio been withdrawn in January, and united with the army under Houston, the bloody stories of the Alamo and Labahia would never have been written, and the battle of San Jacinto might have been fought on the banks of the Brazos. It is true that the losses of the enemy in these encounters had been five times as great as those of the Patriots; but the destruction of a few thousand men was nothing to a nation of eight millions of inhabitants, while the loss of every hundred fearfully weakened a little community of ten thousand. Why these considerations were overlooked, is a question upon which speculation might do injustice either to the living or to the dead.

Gray, who had returned from his mission to Goliad, feeling that this was no time for a lover of Texas to repose, mounted his horse, and, in company with Pedro, again turned his face to the westward. His object was to obtain the earliest information of the march of an invading army. Deeming it too hazardous to pass beyond the Nueces, they selected a wooded knoll, from which, by the aid of spy-glasses, they had a clear view of the main road. Here they watched and waited. Days passed, and no living thing moved along the deserted highway. At length, the warlike notes of a bugle, sounding afar off, fell faintly on their ears. A strong body of horse next appeared in sight, whose green uniforms, red bonnets, and gleaming lances, left no doubt of their character. Behind these followed five or six brass pieces of field artillery — then a siege-train of twenty-four pounders, and mortars of eight and

ten-inch calibre; and lastly, a serried line of infantry, armed with muskets and bayonets of British manufacture.

The heart of Gray beat high as he gazed on the martial show.

"By the Lord, Pedro, these are different troops from any we have yet encountered."

"Yes, Señor; and what is more to the purpose, they are led by different officers. Cos is a coward, and Ugartachea a fool; but Santa Anna is neither the one nor the other."

"I see no sign of his presence in yonder host."

"No. This is probably only his advanced division. But these troops have been trained under his own eye, and whoever leads them is a tried and trusted soldier. See how firm and orderly they come on. See with what regularity and precision they file into their respective places of encampment. No noise. No confusion. No disorder. They are the veterans of Tampico I suspect, but my eyes are too dim to catch the inscriptions on their banners."

"You must have been a soldier yourself, Pedro."

"I fought through the war of independence, and doubt not that there are grey-haired men in yonder camp who have stood side by side with me, against the armies of Old Spain."

The remembrance of other days, and the contrast between his situation then, and now, made the old man's voice quiver with an emotion he could not suppress. Gray noticed it, and said, soothingly,

"I can well imagine, that it is very hard to stand face to face, as foes, with one whose friendly blanket we have often shared by the camp-fire; but the fault is not yours, my friend. If they see fit to abandon the free principles for which you fought, and convert their bayonets into props for a Despot's throne, they have little claim upon your kind remembrance."

"So I reason myself, Señor. Besides, God knows, I have no cause to love extravagantly the land that gave me birth. She cast me from her bosom, and made me a wandering pau-

per, because I sought to keep her children free. Still it saddens me to think, that the strength yet left in this withered arm will soon be employed against the associates of my youth."

Mustang Gray too fully appreciated his feelings to continue the conversation, and turning away, he devoted his whole attention to the movements on the plain below. It was the first time he had ever seen the bivouac of a regular army; yet, novice as he was, he could not fail to note the perfection of all their dispositions; and even his bold heart owned a tremor, when he reflected that there was nothing but the naked breasts of an undisciplined Peasantry, to oppose to this formidable band. The sun had gone down, and the stars had come forth, before he again addressed his comrade:

"We must ride, Pedro, and ride rapidly. Every hour gained now, is worth a hundred lives."

Their horses were saddled, and making a wide circuit to avoid the Patrol, and Picket guards, they regained the road, many miles to the eastward of the Nueces. Through the whole night their steeds were pushed on. In the morning they parted — Gray taking the road to San Antonio, and Pedro to Goliad. Col. Travis was then in command of the Alamo, and to him Gray communicated intelligence of the approach of the formidable army he had seen encamp on the Nueces.

"It is fearful odds," said the hero, looking around on his little band of one hundred and forty men, "and two days, which is the most they will allow us, is a short time to collect provisions for a siege."

"Surely you do not expect to defend this post," said Gray. "You must dismantle the fortress, and retreat."

"Never. I shall neither retreat nor surrender. Come in what force they may, I shall fight it out as long as there is a man here able to handle a rifle."

One glance satisfied Gray that there was no changing the

resolution of that iron man; and his own heart panted to share with him the peril, and the glory of the hopeless struggle.

"Well, Colonel, since such is your purpose, I have one request to make. In ten days every man within these walls will be numbered with the dead. I have a friend here, whose life is valuable to his family and his country — let me take his place, and send him forward with the news I bring."

"Certainly, if such is his wish. But as I shall force no man to remain against his will, so I shall force no one to go away without his own consent."

The duties which devolved upon the commander of the Alamo in this emergency, demanded all his attention, and he turned away to issue the necessary orders, leaving Gray to urge what arguments he choose upon Saxon. The bold frontiersman listened with an indignant air to a proposition that it seemed to him contained the very essence of dishonor.

"Not I," was his prompt reply. "I should never be able to hold up my head in the settlements, if I left Barret Travis in such a strait as this. You mean it kindly, and I thank you; but you must even ride on yourself. Good bye. Kiss Josefa and the children, and if the Mexican wolves do make food of my carcase, take care of them."

There was a tear in the eye of Gray, and his voice was choked and husky with emotion.

"Be assured, that neither want nor danger shall come near them, while Mustang Gray has an arm and a rifle. Good bye. I have lingered here too long, since I have failed to persuade you to go in my place. I must ride fast and far, to spread the news of the coming storm."

For a moment he wrung the horny hand of his friend with a vice-like grasp — sprang into the saddle, and was gone. Saxon gazed after him until the clatter of his horses' hoofs died away in the distance, and then joined one of the busy

groups, who were making preparations to meet the expected assault.

The news borne by Gray, did not come unexpectedly to the Texan authorities. They had never doubted that a desperate struggle was before them, and had in vain striven to dispel the singular infatuation under which the people labored. There was no army in the field, and couriers had to be dispatched to the scattered settlements to collect the men who, under the impression that there was no immediate call for their services, had returned to their homes. So far did this feeling of security extend, that many volunteers had actually marched back to the United States. The delusion did not end until it was known that Ramirez Sezma had invested the Alamo, and in obedience to orders from his chief, displayed a blood-red flag from the church of Bexar, as a signal that no quarter would be given. Ten days of torturing suspense followed, when the nation was shocked by the mournful story that the Alamo had been taken by storm, and every man of its glorious defenders killed at his post. This was an event for which Mustang Gray had hourly looked, and in view of which his preparations had already been made. Allowing time for the first burst of grief to subside, he entered the chamber of Josefa — acquainted her with the last request of her husband, and urged her immediate departure for the eastward.

"When Goliad is taken," he said, "as it soon must be, if it is not already abandoned, there will be nothing to obstruct the march of Santa Anna, and his columns will certainly be directed hither. Texas needs every man she can gather, and I must not be the last to take the field; but I cannot leave you until I know you are beyond the reach of a brutal soldiery. Get ready, and let us go."

The new-made widow dried her tears, and, without a word of objection, began her preparations for immediate departure.

These were soon completed, and the mourning group, bidding adieu to the homestead which had sheltered them so long, bent their steps to the town of Nacogdoches. Every arrangement that could be made for their comfort was made by Gray before he left them, and returned with Pedro and Allison to join the army of General Houston.

Following closely upon the heels of the storming of the Alamo, came the news of the surrender of Fannin and Ward, and the barbarous murder of the whole command, in open violation of the articles of surrender. The deep gloom which these tidings spread among the Texan soldiery, was mingled with a burning thirst for revenge, so intense that their more prudent commander found it difficult to resist their importunate demands to be led at once to battle. It was known that a column, under Sezma, was moving on San Felipe, where General Houston was then quartered; and the fiery spirits who surrounded him fondly hoped that here, at last, their impatience for action would be gratified. The General had no such intention. He still calculated upon receiving succors from the United States; and, at any rate, the further they advanced into the interior, the more the invading army would be weakened and scattered. Upon the approach of Sezma, the town of San Felipe was reduced to ashes, and the American army fell slowly back in the direction of Harrisburg. On the 19th of April, the two armies were in sight of each other; but, as Santa Anna was expecting strong reinforcements under Cos, he did not venture to give battle. On the 20th, the Mexicans were employed in throwing up a breastwork of earth and trees. On the morning of the 21st, the impatience of the Texans had reached an uncontrollable height, and they were accordingly drawn up in front of the enemy, and ordered to attack him in his entrenchments. Advancing rapidly, they poured in one close and well-directed volley, and then, with a wild cry of "Remember the Alamo!" poured like a torrent on

the foe. The right and left wings of the Mexicans broke at the first onset; the centre behaved better, but it was only to add to the slaughter. In fifteen minutes the battle was over, and the Mexican army annihilated.

As Gray leaped the breastwork, he was met by a Mexican officer, who promptly advanced upon him sword in hand. One sweep of his rifle-barrel, and the blade was shivered like glass. Again his arm was raised, when it was suddenly suspended by hearing, in the well-known tones of Bartolo Piedras,

"Quarter, Señor! I am defenceless."

Gray dropped his rifle, and cordially grasped the hand of his former friend and patron. A fierce soldier, who had just drawn his knife from the bosom of a Mexican, noticed the action, and shouted "Kill him, d—n him! he was one of the butchers of the Alamo."

Gray turned to see if he could recognise the speaker; but the soldier was already many yards off, in eager pursuit of another victim. The space around them had now cleared away. All, victors and vanquished, had alike rushed on. Taking Piedras by the hand, he led him into an island of timber.

"Rest here," he said, "until I catch one of the horses that are running masterless over the plain."

Returning with a richly caparisoned steed, he bade him mount and make the best speed to the army of Filisola. Piedras would have overwhelmed him with thanks; but Gray impatiently urged him to be gone; telling him that every moment's delay was dangerous.

So much time had thus been lost, that it was useless to think of joining in the further pursuit, and our hero walked back to the field, to offer his assistance in taking care of the wounded. The number of these was so small, that the duty was soon discharged; and when Pedro, who had been one of the foremost in the attack, and the last in the pursuit, returned, wearied and blood-stained, he found Gray stretched upon a

blanket, revolving his future plans. After recounting what had occurred between Piedras and himself, he added: "I have been thinking what to do with Josefa. Her home is in ashes now, and I doubt if she will wish to rebuild it. Yet, what else can be done?"

"Carry her to the San Antonio Rancho. Piedras has forfeited it by appearing in arms against the country; but it will be easy to secure it for his sister."

"Will you remain with her, Pedro, to manage her affairs, and, if need be, protect and defend her?"

"Certainly. Where you go, I shall go."

"But I am going on a long journey, and may be absent for months. Will you guard her well, when I am gone?"

"As carefully as I would an image of the Virgin Mary. While one drop of blood flows in these veins, no injury shall befal her."

"Thank you, my old friend. I know you to be trusty, prudent, and brave; and I shall feel secure that my promise to her dead husband will be redeemed. You are weary and hungry: get some food, and let us sleep, for we know not what duty we may be called to perform to-morrow."

The historical events which immediately followed the battle of San Jacinto are too familiar to be recited here. Filisola fell back towards the Rio Grande, slowly and reluctantly, however, as if he longed to turn and give battle to Gen. Rusk, who was hanging on his rear. Gray remained with Rusk's army until they arrived at Victoria, where tidings reached them that a treaty of peace had been concluded with Santa Anna. The news was received by the troops with great and general dissatisfaction. To our hero it was welcome on many accounts. In the first place, it left him at liberty to carry out the plans he had been arranging for placing the wife and children of Saxon in comfortable circumstances. Above and beyond this, there had lately come upon him an irresistible

longing to visit once more the land of his birth, and tread among the remembered scenes of his infancy. In the life he had led at Corpus Christi there was much to make a proud and high-toned man feel that he was degraded and debased by his occupations. Then he had no desire to return. Since that time he had been one of the most efficient, as well as the most dauntless, of the soldiers in a high and holy cause. He felt proud of himself, and knew that all who had been associated with him appreciated his services, and did honor to his name. He could not now go back as a mere fugitive from justice, or as an unknown adventurer. His name was indelibly written on one of the most glorious pages of history. He might, indeed, be subjected to a prosecution for the death of Robert Taliafero, but he knew that no real danger was to be apprehended; and the public trial from which he shrunk while he was yet nameless, could bring no mortification now. Even if it had been otherwise, he would have braved the worst. The memory of his early love haunted him, and he was thirsting to look upon Julia Allison, and listen again to the silvery tones of her voice. Silently he made his preparations—he communicated his purpose to no one—and, as soon as Josefa was safely established in her new home, solitary and alone he directed his course towards the rising sun.

CHAPTER XI.

"Existence may be borne, and the deep root
Of life and sufferance make its firm abode
In bare and desolated bosoms: mute
The camel labors with the heaviest load,
And the wolf dies in silence."

It was a sweet evening in the summer of 1836. Julia Allison was reclining on the long grass upon the bank of the Cape Fear, with a volume in her hand. She was changed — greatly changed; but was still one of the loveliest of her sex, although a settled sadness upon her countenance spoke too plainly of nights of sorrow and of tears. Suddenly a tall man stood before her. His frame was lithe and sinewy as that of the panther when it has just grown to maturity, and the arms that were folded on his broad breast were ridged and knotted even in repose. Long exposure to the wind and the sun had imparted a dark hue to his cheek, which added to, rather than detracted from his extraordinary beauty. Her attention had been so much absorbed by the book, and his step had been so light, that she did not notice his presence until a deep sigh apprised her she was not alone. Springing to her feet like a startled fawn, she hurriedly exclaimed:

"Who are you? and what do you want?"

"War, exile, and hardship, are rough acquaintances, know," he replied, raising the broad sombrero from his head, and letting his arms fall slowly to his side. "But I had hoped that even they had not effaced from the memory of Julia Allison all recollection of Mabry Gray."

It was several moments before her answer was given, and then it was rather as if questioning herself than addressing her words to him:

"Mabry Gray! What brings him here, where his presence can call up none but images of sorrow?"

"What carries the inebriate to the bowl he knows will prove his destruction? What draws the fluttering bird into the jaws of the charming snake? I have come from the far South-West, to tell you that I love you, blindly, madly, as of yore. In the dense forest — upon the mountain-guarded stream — on the broad bosom of the rolling Prairie, your image has been forever present with me. Many and many a time, on the lonely scout, have I forgotten the dangers around me — forgotten the hungry panther, and the prowling savage, when my eye caught a glimpse of the little star that, years agone, I had christened 'Julia.' Now I have come to tell you of it — to ask you to travel with me to a murmuring stream that winds through the flowery meads of Texas, and snatch from the joys of the future compensation for the miseries of the past."

"It is painful, Sir, to listen to such words from you. Your suit is hopeless, and you ought to have spared me the necessity of saying so. You had your answer long ago."

"Ay, but it *was* long ago. Many things have occurred to work changes in us both. I have written a name in history since then, that will not die. You, too, are changed. We are neither of us what we were."

"That you have acted well and gallantly in a noble cause, all report agrees; and I rejoiced to hear it, Mabry Gray, for it required many a green leaf to hide the bloody deeds of your previous career. John writes us that you are rich. Go, and enjoy the wealth and renown you have won. I do not love you; and would not marry you, if I did. There are obstacles mountain-high to the accomplishment of your wishes."

"I can guess at one of the obstacles to which you allude. I know far more than you dream of. I was sitting at the root of yonder pine-tree the last time you passed this place, leaning on the arm of Robert Taliafero."

A deadly pallor spread over the countenance of Julia Allison. Her limbs trembled violently, and she seemed about sinking to the earth. Recovering herself by a mighty effort of determined self-control, she turned her large blue eyes upon him with a look of mingled anguish and reproach.

"And with that knowledge, would you seal your misery and mine by taking me to your bosom as a wife?"

"Why not? A moment of madness has been atoned for by years of penitence. Your fault is known to no human being save myself. The tongue that might have revealed it was cold and stiff before it had a chance to boast its owner's villany. Come with me, then — a love like mine will win its own reward. You cannot watch the crystal fountain bubbling up from the lowest depths of my heart, without feeling a sympathy that will in time ripen into passion. Nature formed me for the endearments of home. With you by my side, I shall be as gentle as the cooing dove."

"Mabry Gray," was the firm reply, "you said rightly just now, when you told me you were greatly changed. There was a time when you would have scorned yourself for making such a proposition. Go, Sir. My good name is in your power — blast it, if you choose; but come not near me again."

Gray gazed upon the lovely woman before him with feelings it would be impossible to define. From an irresistible impulse, he caught her in his arms, lifted her from the ground, and imprinted a burning kiss upon her lips. It was his first and his last. Without a word of adieu, he replaced her on her feet, and walked away through the overshadowing pines. The action had been so sudden, so unexpected, that she had not time to utter a cry before he was gone. The firmness with

which she had borne up in his presence gave way, now that she was alone; and, struggling with contending emotions, she sank trembling on the ground. When she recovered her self-possession, she missed the little volume she had been reading, and searched for it in vain. It was nowhere to be found. With slow and measured steps she returned towards her father's house, wondering if she had not dealt too harshly with one who had loved her so long, and preserved her secret, under trying circumstances, so faithfully. Another question also arose: should she communicate the fact of her late interview with Mabry Gray to her family, or leave them to hear of his return from other sources. She doubted whether the news would give her father pain or pleasure, and therefore concluded to say nothing on the subject.

In the meantime, Gray had gone directly to his own house. His last hope had been crushed; yet he was calm — calm, perhaps, from the very consciousness that the worst had come. The house was tenantless, and rank weeds filled the little yard and garden. His old servants were dead, and none remained to weed out the noxious growth. A slight effort shook the decaying door from the hinges, and he stepped into the desolate building. Every article of furniture had been removed. The bare walls alone welcomed the wanderer back to his home.

"House and owner are alike," he muttered. "Both desolate — both mouldering in gloomy loneliness away. Well, I shall pass one more night beneath this loved and remembered roof, and then bid it adieu forever."

Stretching his limbs upon the hard floor, and shading his eyes with his hand, he slept, or seemed to sleep. Who can tell what visions thronged around that rough and lonely couch? Were they of that early time before love had come to scatter madness through his heart and brain? Or of that period when the passion first began to bud, and the treacherous god strewed

his pathway with the flowers of hope, and shed around him the incense of anticipated joy? Were the fires of jealousy again burning in his bosom? or did the picture of the bloody retribution rise up before him? Or were all these swept away, to make room for the wild scout upon the Prairie, and the fierce excitement of the battle and the victory? Alas! we can never know; for men such as he tell no tales of midnight visitants. If the young could sit by and see, as in a panorama, the varied shapes that come in turn to torture the wretch whose own ungoverned passions have led him into crime, many a virtue, now doomed to be withered, would bloom with undiminished sweetness to the grave.

The mission of Mabry Gray in North Carolina was at an end. Secretly, as he came, he took his departure. There was no other form he wished to see—no other voice he wished to hear. The shades of night yet darkened the earth when he cast himself upon his mother's grave — stretched his arms over the cold clay that hid her mouldering form, and murmured, "To you, at least, I was always gentle and good. No word or act of mine ever brought a tear to your eyelids. Mother, oh mother! look down upon your son. Pity and forgive the thing I am, and the worse I may become."

A month later, Pedro, who was herding cattle upon the Prairie, observed a speck on the distant horizon. The treaty of peace concluded with Santa Anna had been repudiated by the Mexican Government; and, though no regular invasion had been attempted, constant incursions were made into Texas by bands of plunderers from the Rio Grande. The Indians, too, were exceedingly troublesome; so that every moving object was watched with careful vigilance. Raising the spy-glass he always carried to his eye, the old man examined the approaching object long and closely. He was apparently satisfied with the scrutiny; for when he closed the glass, he rode directly out to meet it. He had recognised the iron-grey horse, and tall, sinewy form of Mustang Gray.

"You are welcome back, Señor," he said, when he was near enough to address him; "we have troubled times out here, and I shall feel safer when I know that you are within yonder palisades."

As soon as their first greetings were over, and Gray's eager inquiries after the health of Josefa and her children answered, Pedro gave brief directions to his assistant herdsmen, and rode with him to the enclosure surrounding the houses. There was rejoicing that night in the *Rancho del tres niños*, as Josefa had termed it; for, although the bold and fearless character of Pedro had inspired the Peons with a reasonable degree of confidence, there was probably not one, except the dare-devil boy Diego, who did not tremble at every anticipated attack of Camanches or marauding Mexicans. Their opinions of Gray's personal prowess were so exalted, that wherever he was they felt secure; and under his eye they would fight bravely and well, when without him they would run like frightened sheep. In point of fact, the Rancho was one of the most secure and easily defended on the border. It had been strongly built by Bartolo Piedras — was so far removed from any of the direct routes, and was understood to be so watchfully guarded, that roving bands of Indians or Mexicans did not care to molest a place where hard blows were more abundant than plunder.

For months, Gray's chief occupation was catching wild horses — a sport so exciting, that he almost forgot to mourn over the past. Returning from one of these excursions, he was met a short distance from the Rancho by Diego, who approached, saying in a low voice,

"The devil has come at last, Señor."

"Who?"

"Bartolo Piedras."

"Do you call him the devil?"

"If he is not the Old One himself, he is near kin to him."

"No matter what he may be, Diego, he means me well. I saved his life at San Jacinto."

"Beware, Señor, how you trust him. Watch him; and whenever you doubt, strike quick and sure."

There was an earnestness in the boy's manner which impressed Gray more than he chose to acknowledge. Besides, he knew Bartolo Piedras well enough to be sure that no tie was likely to bind him save that of self-interest. Still, he did not wish to be more communicative than necessary with his young follower, whose jealous suspicions required no additional stimulus. Looking him full in the face, he replied deliberately,

"You have little love for your old master, it would seem."

"Love! How could I love a thing at which I have shuddered almost from the cradle up?"

"True. Love is not the companion of fear. Be easy; I *will* watch him, and if need be, *strike* him too."

There was no conversation until after the evening repast was removed, beyond the usual inquiries of men upon friendly terms, who have met for the first time after a long separation. Gray was confident that something more important than a visit to his sister had brought Bartolo to their dwelling, and was not surprised when he said,

"I have come, at some risk, to propose to you a speculation that I think will be very profitable. The war between Texas and Mexico has, in a great degree, destroyed the contraband trade, although there never was a time when greater gains could be realized. If I can secure the aid of a bold and enterprising American, it can be carried on in such a manner as to enable me to recover all I have lost by the revolution. By the establishment of a depôt at this Rancho, and one on the Rio Grande, there will be no serious difficulty in the transmission of goods to the interior of either Texas or Mexico. Without my aid, you cannot cross the Rio Grande. Without yours, I cannot pass the San Antonio. By combining our interests, the

whole country is open to us both. Will you join me in the speculation? The profits to be equally divided between us."

Gray cared little for wealth. It was the excitement of the pursuit that presented an irresistible attraction to his restless mind. His last interview with Julia Allison had given a death-blow to all his hopes of peace or rest hereafter. He longed once more to mingle in the fierce struggles of his kind. The midnight ride, the fierce pursuit, and the wild cries of a border fray, were sights and sounds that, to his chafed spirit, wore the form of joy. Piedras read a favorable answer in the flushed cheek and sparkling eye, before his lips had moved. Josefa, too, had watched his changing features with almost a mother's interest. She hoped he would reject the proposition; but, when she found this was not to be, she listened with marked attention to the details of their future plans, occasionally taking part in the conversation, and throwing out suggestions of her own. It was arranged that Piedras should return to Mexico, while Gray visited San Antonio to recruit assistants among the most daring and desperate of his countrymen. In this enterprise, he did not mean to rely upon Mexican courage, or Mexican fidelity. There was no lack of men upon the frontier, who were ready to engage in any adventure that gave them present employment, and promised future remuneration. Generally, their whole earthly possessions consisted of a horse, a rifle, a pistol, and a knife. Thus armed and equipped, sometimes singly, sometimes two or three together, they would make incursions for hundreds of miles into the country of the Camanches, or the Mexican settlements along the Rio Grande, carrying off horses, *serapis*, and whatever else they could sell—which they disposed of to the traders at about half their actual value. The funds thus obtained were squandered in reckless revelry, and the Ranger again sought the enemy's country to recruit his exhausted finances. If the time happened to be unpropitious, he "located" at the first Racho where an Ame-

rican was settled. No pay was asked or expected. It was only in the towns that compensation for board and lodging was ever demanded. While he remained, he assisted his host in herding his cattle, drying his hides, catching wild horses, and killing deer; but all this was purely voluntary. He felt himself entirely at liberty to follow the bent of his own inclination, and work or sleep as he chose. Whenever the cause of his temporary inactivity was removed, he rode away, carrying a small bag of salt, another of jerked beef, and a water-gourd hung at his saddle-bow. For weeks he would not be heard of. If successful, as he generally was, he would bring a fine horse—a Mexican blanket of unusually brilliant dye — or some costly trinket, as a present to his late entertainer. The remainder of his plunder was carried to the nearest town, and the proceeds squandered as before.

From among these men, Mustang Gray selected four, with whom he returned to the Rancho of Josefa, to await tidings of Piedras. The Mexican had acted with his usual promptitude, and, in a short time, a messenger came to announce that, on a given day, a train of pack-mules would leave the Rio Grande, which Gray was requested to meet at a point about half way between Matamoras and the San Antonio, where it was judged more prudent that the Mexican escort should turn back. For two years their profitable traffic was continued without any interruption more serious than an occasional skirmish with roving bands of Indians, over whom the superior arms and discipline of the smugglers always insured an easy victory. In the meantime, Piedras had accumulated such a fortune as would enable him to live in ease and affluence at the capital; and he began to contemplate abandoning the business, and taking up his abode in the splendid city of the Montezumas. He would not have been a Mexican if he had carried out this plan openly and fairly, after due notice to his partner. Knowing that a very valuable train was on its way to his Hacienda,

he conceived the idea, not only of appropriating the whole to himself, but of securing the person of Gray, and compelling him to pay a large additional amount for his ransom. He had heretofore given his intended victim no possible occasion to question his good faith; and, from the long impunity that had attended their smuggling operations, he doubted not that he would come slimly attended. It turned out as he had anticipated, and Piedras marked, with inward exultation, that, of Gray's whole escort, there were only two, Pedro Gomez and an American named Smith, who were not devoted to his own interest. It did not escape the notice of the watchful Pedro, that an unusual number of Peons were gathered within the Hacienda; and at nightfall he observed that, instead of the single sentry usually posted at the gate, two others had been added. Still, he did not like to communicate his suspicions until he had found something more tangible on which to base them. As soon as it was sufficiently dark, he crept along in the shadow of the houses to an open window of the apartment occupied by Piedras. There he saw enough to dispel every lingering doubt. Hurrying back to his comrades, who were now fast asleep, he shook them roughly, and whispered,

"Up, Señors, quick, or this will be your last sleep."

To men accustomed as they were to sudden surprises, it required only a minute to be prepared for whatever action the crisis demanded.

"We must make for the gate," said Pedro, when he saw they were ready. "It is our only hope. There are three sentries there, but we can dispose of them with our knives before the alarm is given."

Rapidly, though noiselessly, they made their way to the gate. Two sentries only were visible, who were crossing each other at regular intervals. The third was concealed from view by the shadow of the arched gateway in which he was reclining. This circumstance created a momentary embarrass

ment, but there was no time for hesitation. Gray and Smith bounded upon the two whom the starlight revealed to their gaze. It was hardly a moment before the dull fall of two bodies to the earth, announced that two souls had fled. The third sentry, seeing the fate of the others, started from the shadow where he had been concealed, and fired his escopeta at random. Almost at the same instant the knife of Pedro was buried in his bosom. Before the bars that fastened the gate could be removed, the flashing lights revealed fifteen or twenty armed Peons rushing to the spot. The fierce spirit of Gray got the better of discretion.

"Give them," he shouted, "a dose of lead before we part."

In obedience to the order, three rifle-shots were sent with deadly effect among the advancing rabble — They paused — A strong hand swung open the massy gate; and it seemed that the fugitives were safe. At that moment the voice of Bartolo Piedras was heard sternly ordering his retainers to "fire."

"Out, Pedro! Out, Smith!" shouted Gray. "Follow the cattle-path to the river; we'll baffle them there."

Twenty bullets came whistling through the gateway, while the words were yet upon his lips, and Pedro Gomez fell across the entrance. Unwilling to leave his old and faithful friend as long as there was breath in his body, Gray stooped to examine whether he was dead, or only wounded. The action, quick as it was, cost him dear. The butt-end of an escopeta fell upon his bowed head, and stretched him upon the lifeless body.

It was deep night, before he recovered from the stunning effects of the blow. He tried in vain to make out where he was — Not a sound was heard — Not a ray of light was seen. In attempting to rise to his feet, an iron manacle galled his ancle, and the clanking of a chain reminded him, that he was a prisoner in the hands of a man who knew neither pity nor

remorse. No one came near him until nearly eleven o'clock in the morning. Then a servant entered, whom he did not remember to have before seen about the Hacienda, bearing an earthern jar of water, a platter of tortillas, and a bowl of beef, stewed after the Mexican fashion. The severe blow upon his head had been followed by a fever, which parched his lips and throat as dry as cinders. Seizing the water-jar, he half emptied it of its contents before the long draught was ended. Of the food he partook more sparingly; wounds and imprisonment not being in general the best sharpeners of the appetite. He never dreamed of obtaining from a dependant of Bartolo Piedras any information he was not ordered to impart; and supposing all conversation fruitless, ate his meal in silence.

"Tell your master," he said at its conclusion, "that when he is at leisure I should like to know why I have been subjected to this treatment."

"He is gone," was the short and sullen reply.

"Gone! The devil he has! Where has he gone?—and why am I chained here?"

The servant, who had communicated all he intended to do, moved out without another word.

The morning after Gray had been entrapped and imprisoned, Piedras took the various bales of smuggled goods, and proceeded with them to the interior towns. His object was to dispose of these and secure the proceeds before seeking an interview with his prisoner, for whose ransom he intended to extort a large sum from Josefa and John Allison. The dim outlines of another scheme of villainous treachery were also tracing themselves upon his mind. He had studied the character of Mustang Gray too closely to doubt that if he was once at liberty, he would stop at no means to wreak a deadly vengeance for the wrong he was now suffering. He did not regard his own removal to the Capital as a sufficient precaution; and, in order to insure his personal safety at the same time his ava-

rice was gratified, he proposed, after receiving the ransom money, to execute Gray as a spy, and report it as a praiseworthy act of loyalty to the Government.

For two days the captive saw no one but his silent jailor. On the third the door was opened at an unusual hour, and a female of surpassing loveliness walked into the room. Rising to his feet, he waited in respectful silence for his unexpected visitor to announce the cause of her presence in that gloomy chamber.

"Do you know me, Señor?"

"I should say that it was the Senorita Inez, if I could account for her presence in this den of robbers, though it has been long since I looked upon that sweet face, and exquisite form."

"It is worse," she replied; "Worse, much worse, than a den of robbers, or murderers either. But we have no time to speak of that at present. I have come to tell you that tomorrow night you shall be free."

"A thousand thanks, Senorita, for your good intentions. Pardon me, however, if I doubt your success. Bartolo Piedras would not leave an enemy so dangerous as I am likely to prove, in such poor custody that his liberation can be easily effected."

"Bartolo Piedras, with all his caution, forgot that others might bribe as well as himself. Here is the key to your chain. Let it remain locked until the hour comes for escape."

Gray seized the little hand that extended to him the means of deliverance, and pressed it to his lips.

"You saved me once before from a danger into which my own wild folly led me. From this day forth, I shall call you my good angel."

"Wait, Señor. Wait until you are free before you thank me."

The antelope does not bound more lightly than the fair girl

stepped towards the door. Once—twice, her soft hand tapped the iron-studded timbers — it was opened — she passed out, and he was again alone. For a long time he gazed upon the solid planks which shut out that lovely creature from his vision. What were his thoughts? Was a new love about to come and take the place of the old? Ah! no; his first passion had been written in letters of adamant; and no time, no change, no circumstance, could efface the characters. Yet there was something more than gratitude in the feeling her presence had awakened. The chiseled brow, the long lash, the ruby lip, and the exquisite form, had stamped themselves upon his mind and heart. Through the ashes that had been left by former fires there ran an electric spark, not enough, indeed, to warm the smouldering heap into life, but enough to show that the instinct of admiration for the beautiful never wholly dies.

From his visitor his thoughts turned upon his own situation. Notwithstanding the injunction of Inez, he could not resist the inclination to apply the key to the lock. The chain fell off. In the wild delight of feeling that his limbs were once more free, he bounded nearly to the ceiling; then capered about the room in childish glee. His exultation in some degree subsiding, he returned to the chain, and replaced it on his leg. In doing so, another thought struck him: perhaps Inez might fail in effecting his liberation. Eagerly he looked around the room for some weapon to be used in the last resort. There was not a chair, a stool, a bench—nothing but the bare walls and naked floor. His eye rested on the water-jar alone.

"It is a poor weapon," he muttered, "but it will crush one skull, and I shall leave them that legacy at least before my limbs are shackled again without my own consent. Possibly Bartolo Piedras may come within my reach, and if he does, our accounts will be speedily balanced."

To the captive with the promise of liberation before him,

how slowly roll away the hours! To Gray it seemed a month before Inez again made her appearance. At the appointed time she entered the room, and addressed him in her ordinary tone of voice:

"All is prepared. Unlock your chain, and follow me."

Passing by two or three rooms, she entered a third in which a solitary light was burning. Pointing to a table in the centre of the room, she said,

"There is your own pistol and knife. I could not get your gun; but here is another imported from England by Bartolo Piedras for his own use."

It was a double-barreled Manton of the largest calibre, and in perfect order. Gray clutched the weapons, inwardly ejaculating, "Now I am indeed free."

A sentry was posted at the gate as usual. At a sign from Inez, he withdrew the single bar that now alone fastened it, and permitted them to pass out unquestioned. Some hundred paces from the gate, there was a hollow way where two steeds were fastened; one of which Gray recognized as his own. At the first sound of his voice the trained courser neighed loudly, and when near enough rubbed his head fondly against the bosom of his owner.

Inez, who had hitherto led the way in silence, unfastened the other horse, and by the aid of the steep bank leaped upon him; at the same time calling impatiently to Gray, who was still caressing his steed.

"Mount, Señor. This is no place to linger."

"I am ready," he replied, vaulting into the saddle. "Whither do you go, for I must see you in safety before providing for my own."

"I go with you."

"With me!" he repeated in astonishment. "With me! Why I must cross a desert two hundred miles in extent, infested by murdering savages, and still bloodier banditti. In

the morning I can never know whether a mouthful of food or a drop of water will pass my lips during the day; and when I seek the repose tired nature demands, the chances are even that I shall be awakened by a knife in my throat, or an arrow in my side."

"Nevertheless I go with you. I have suffered that in yonder Hacienda, in comparison with which the horrors you paint would be agreeable pleasures. But this is no time for explanation. You shall have that when we have placed the river between us and the blood-hounds of Piedras. Lead on."

There was no opposing the behests of a woman to whom he owed so much, and though his heart misgave him grievously, he made no further objection to the plan she seemed so determined upon carrying into execution. An easy ride brought them to the river. It was swollen by rains above, until the waters were nearly level with the banks. The current, at all times rapid and strong, was now rushing with arrowy swiftness to the Gulf. Gray shrunk from trusting the frail thing by his side to the mercy of the angry torrent.

"You can never make the passage, Senorita. I have seen bold men grow dizzy, and lose the saddle in a stream less dangerous than this. Let me seek shelter for you in some of the Haciendas in the neighborhood."

"No, no. Go on. You know not what I can bear, or from what I am flying."

"Then give me your rein. Hold fast to the saddle, and keep your eyes fixed on the stars."

Tying the bridle short on the neck of his own practised charger, he took hers by the bit, and leading him below, so as to break, as much as possible, the force of the current, plunged into the raging flood. The dark waters flashed and roared around them, sweeping horses and riders far down the stream. But still they kept their heads towards the land, and still the dim outlines of the opposite bank grew more and more distinct.

"We'll make it," muttered Gray to himself. "We'll make it. We shall strike the sand-bar, and that must be packed as hard as a rock by the waters. The danger is over."

Almost as he spoke, the forefeet of the horses touched the sand-bar, and a few more steps placed them in safety.

"Thanks be to the Virgin," ejaculated Inez. "It is over."

"You have more cause to be thankful than you are aware of, Senorita," responded her companion. "I would rather fight all the Mexicans between this and Matamoras, than take that fearful swim again. If the current had swept us fifty yards lower down, we could have found no landing-place for miles."

The courage that had sustained Inez while the danger was actually impending, in a great measure deserted her. Her frame shook with nervous apprehension, and Gray rode for some distance with his hand upon her arm, to prevent her falling from the saddle. The sun had long been up before they reached the water-hole, at which he proposed to make the first halt for rest and refreshment. Here he lifted the wearied girl from her horse — spread a blanket on the grass, and placing a water-gourd, together with the provisions she had prepared for the journey, by her side, he bade her eat and rest, while he removed the accoutrements from the horses, and staked them out to graze. He returned from the performance of this duty, to find Inez buried in profound sleep. The long ride, and the high excitement, had exhausted her delicate frame, and Nature came with kindly hand to close her eyes in forgetfulness. Moving off a short distance, he took a seat upon the ground, and ate with the appetite of a strong man after a long fast. Then reclining upon the greensward, he slept as soundly as his fair companion.

It was past the hour of noon when he awoke. Inez still slept. Not wishing to disturb her, he walked softly away to the horses, replaced the saddles, filled the water-gourds anew,

and lastly, subjected his arms to a careful examination. Intently engaged in this occupation, he did not notice that Ines had risen to her feet, until she approached him, saying,

"I am afraid that you think me a sluggard, Señor. Why did you not wake me?"

"It was not needful. It will be at least an hour before you can bear exposure to this burning sun. In the meantime, I advise you to take some food. Your meal this morning was a light one."

There was no necessity for repeating the advice. Her long sleep had brought back her appetite; and, simple as the fare was, abstinence and exercise gave it a relish that had rarely blessed the richer meals to which she was accustomed in the Hacienda of Bartolo Piedras. Gray waited until its conclusion, before he broke the silence.

"I think, Senorita, you promised to inform me how you became an inmate of the Hacienda of Piedras, and what strong motive induced you to fly from it in company with a wild rover like me?"

A flush passed over the cheek of the maiden, extending even to her neck and breast. She buried her face in her hands, and Gray detected a low sob, caused by a struggle to keep back her tears. In a few minutes she looked up, and, throwing back the jetty masses of her hair, began in a voice tremulous with emotion:

"It is a painful story, Señor, though it must be told; and it is better here than elsewhere. For a long time, my father and Piedras have had dealings together. One evening, about a month since, he came to our Posada. They were locked up together during the greater part of the night. What was the subject of their conference I could only guess, from being informed the next morning, that my father intended to dispose of the Posada, and remove to Matamoras. The news was also circulated through Mier; and the business being known to be

profitable, a tenant was soon found. On leaving Mier, I was informed for the first time that our destination was the Rancho of Piedras, instead of Matamoras. I knew well enough that opposition to my father's will would be worse than useless, and submitted in silence to an arrangement I could not alter. We were cordially received, and I was conducted to an apartment furnished in a style to which I was unaccustomed. From time to time, I observed Piedras bestowing upon me glances that brought the blushes to my cheeks; and I began to comprehend that the possession of my person was one of the inducements for drawing the father and the daughter to a place where both would be entirely in his power. Still, he *said* nothing at which I could take offence; and I was compelled to confine my suspicions to my own bosom. Whether my father was apprised of the plan to entrap you, until the night of its execution, I do not know. On that night, he was one of the sentries at the gate; and his dead body was brought in to me soon after the failure of your attempt at flight. While my eyes were overflowing with tears, and my heart almost bursting for the loss of an only parent, Bartolo Piedras entered, carrying a glass of wine, which he insisted I should drink, to sustain me under the great affliction that had come upon me. I drank it mechanically. Listen well, Señor; for the arch-fiend himself never concocted a fouler plot. It was drugged. I awoke in his bed, clasped in his hated arms. I have only a vague recollection of springing from the bed, and looking around for some weapon that would take his life or my own. I cared not greatly which. There was none to be seen. Then came passionate cries and idle threats to report the outrage to the Alcalde."

"'What would that avail you, my pretty Inez?' he asked, in the cold, calculating tone of a demon. 'Where are you to get the money which is necessary to secure the favorable consideration of that respectable functionary?'

"'I will apply to the priest. He, at least, will see that justice is done.'

"'You are right, Inez; exactly right. He *will* lend you his aid, *upon condition* of your according to him those favors you are disposed to deny to me. But be assured the case will linger in his hands until he becomes sated with enjoyment, or has found a new mistress; in either of which events, a few onzas will induce him to withdraw the civil prosecution, and give me absolution besides.'

"The truth—the terrible truth—of all he had said, utterly overwhelmed me. 'Holy Virgin!' I exclaimed, 'is there no hope?' and sunk fainting on the floor."

The strong man, who had faced death in a hundred forms, and scorned them all—whose arm was crimsoned to the elbow—whose daring and desperate nature led him to the field of carnage as to a feast, wept like an infant at this mournful story of a woman's wrongs. Yet, even as the pearly drops trickled to the earth, his whole frame was shaken by a passion more terrible than the rage of the whelpless tigress. Rising suddenly, he shook his clenched hand on high, and shouted, rather than said,

"Devil! devil! This shall be paid for in blood, and tears, and ashes!"

The eyes of Inez sparkled with a brighter lustre.

"So I hoped, and believed. Let me go on, and do not interrupt me until I am done. I returned to consciousness in my own apartment, surrounded by attendants. They handed me a note from Piedras. It began with some sickening professions of undying love—announced that imperative business called him away for the time; and concluded by assuring me that my lot should be a Queenly one if I would only listen to his counsel. I read and re-read it, in vain, to find some allusion to the wrong he had done me—some word that might be tortured into a confession of his guilt. There was nothing of

the kind. The whole epistle had been so artfully concocted, that no one would have believed it was addressed by a successful ravisher to his victim. The paper was crushed in my hand, and thrown from me in despair. For an hour or more I remained motionless on the bed, longing for death. At length a fiercer longing took possession of my bosom. Dismissing the attendants, I made my own toilet, and proceeded alone to my father's room. The gold he had hoarded for his daughter's dowry was secured to be used in avenging that daughter's dishonor. My next step was to obtain a private interview with your jailor. His fidelity was not proof against golden arguments. So far, all had gone well. The greatest difficulty, however, was still to be overcome. I feared the Priest, whose eye was upon everything, and whom I could not bribe. Resolved to leave nothing unattempted, I went to his room, and throwing myself on my knees before him, related all that had occurred between Piedras and myself. He pretended to be very indignant on account of the wrongs I had suffered, and was really so at the charges Piedras had made against himself. Gradually his manner grew more tender, and at length he clasped me in his arms, and pressed a hot kiss upon my lips. The action was not altogether unexpected, yet it made me start as if a serpent had stung me. Recollecting that the success of my plans depended upon his co-operation, I smothered the first feeling of indignant anger, and stooped to play the hypocrite.

"'Not yet, Father,' I said, trying to call a smile to my lips; 'not yet. You must earn your reward before you enjoy it.'

"'What can I do to win raptures the angels might envy?'

"'Help me to my revenge.'

"'You are asking a gread deal, Senorita — more than you are aware of. The reward, though, is a great one. Tell me what you require, and if it is possible I will aid you.'

"'Set free the American prisoner.'

"'What will that avail you?'

"'He is a fearless and a desperate man; revengeful, it is said, to the last degree. Set him at liberty, and I shall know that a hand is armed against the life of Piedras through my agency, that, sooner or later, will reach his heart.'

"'Well, this is better than I expected. I feared you might wish me to take part in a murder. There can be no great harm in conniving at the escape of a single prisoner; and then, if Bartolo Piedras cannot guard his own head, the fault will be none of ours. You must take the management of the affair into your own hands. Say as little about my agency as possible, and only whisper my name when it is absolutely necessary. And then, sweet one———'

"'And then,' I interposed, 'when he is free, I am yours.'

"His eyes absolutely glistened with lascivious fire, as they ran over my face and person. Before I was aware of his design, he again seized me in his arms and printed burning kisses on my lips, and neck, and bosom. With difficulty I freed myself from his embraces, and slipped from the room.

"My task was now easy. The only danger I dreaded was that of being left alone with Padre José, whose uncontrollable passion might lead him to use force for its gratification. So impatient had he become, that he taxed me with tardiness in my preparations for your flight. He dreamed not that I was also making preparations for my own. Last night I threw him into raptures by telling him to extinguish his light, and remain in his own chamber; for as soon as you were beyond the gate, I should come to claim a share of his bed. Oh! how easy it is to deceive the artful and the wily, when passion lends its aid to blind them! That trained and disciplined hypocrite was as confiding as a child, and in all probability, waited until midnight for the coming of a girl who had before that time swum the Rio Grande. Thank God! I am safe from his brutal lust at last."

The narrative of the wronged and outraged girl was concluded. In the bosom of her listener it had excited other feelings than those of pity. There was something in her determined character, and more in her fierce thirst for vengeance, that he recognised as akin to his own nature. The thought came over him that he might have loved her, and been happy, if they had met long ago. Never had he gazed upon a beauty to equal hers. Her long raven tresses were soft as the down on the dove. Intellect was written on the broad forehead, whose polished smoothness shamed the Parian marble. The general expression of her dark eye was a dreamy softness, so sweet, so alluring, that even while it stole away the gazer's soul, it made him feel the glance was cheaply purchased. Around her coral lips all love's dimples had been set, and within them glittered pearls more pure than the Indian diver ever snatched from ocean's depths. The slight olive tinge, imparted by the kisses of a fiery sun, gave a warmer glow to her cheek, and thrilled the heart with the rapturous conviction that the passions of earth were wrapped in the loveliness of heaven. It was not in the nature of Mabry Gray to gaze unmoved on a beauty like hers. Her flushed brow apprised him, that she had noticed his undisguised admiration. Fearing he had offended, he said, with an air of mortification,

"I trust, Senorita, you have no fears of me."

"No, Señor. Insult to our sex is not a fault of your countrymen. They are said to be deadly in their anger, and merciless in their revenge; but never have I heard that the basest of them all had perpetrated an outrage on a woman. Yet would I rather you should say no word, and give me no look of love."

"You are right, Inez; and, to place you still more at ease, let me tell you that I am the last man on earth to cherish a warmer feeling than friendship for the fairest of the daugh-

ters of Eve. Let us mount. We have far to ride before it will be safe to halt again."

Familiar with every by-path, indeed with every tree and bush on the route, Mustang Gray guided his fair companion in safety to the Rancho of Josefa. Here he found that he was given over as dead. Smith had returned, and reported that he saw both Gray and Pedro fall in the gateway, and no one doubted they had been foully murdered. At his appearance safe and unhurt, Josefa was wild with joy, and even the Peons hung around him with noisy manifestations of delight. That night he called the boy Diego into his room.

"I have work for you, my boy."

"Say on, Señor."

"Bartolo Piedras has cumbered the earth long enough. He must die."

"I would have stabbed him long ago, Señor, if you had not forbidden it."

"You must not stab him now. That is a work I have reserved for my own hands. You must desert me, and fly to him. Tell him that I returned from prison raving like a madman, and cursing the whole Mexican race — that for some slight offence I struck you, and felled you to the earth. This will be a sufficient reason for your desertion. To all other questions he may ask, answer plainly and truly. He knows enough to make any attempt to deceive him dangerous. In the mean time watch him — note all his movements — mark everything about the Hacienda — and on the fifteenth night meet me at your father's old huts, on the Rio Grande."

"It shall be done, Señor. I owe him a bitter grudge, and you cannot wish for the hour of payment to come more eagerly than I."

Gray next entered the apartment of Josefa, where he found Inez repeating the story of her wrongs. He seated himself upon a bench, and listened a second time to the horrid tale.

At its conclusion he rose, and standing before Josefa, inquired:

"Well, Mother Josefa, have I not cause to love your brother?"

"Oh! it is dreadful," she exclaimed; "too dreadful. He ought to be hung."

"Hung! In less than twenty days his body shall be roasting amid the fires of his own dwelling, or Mustang Gray will be perjured. My property stolen—myself imprisoned, chained to a convict's ring—Pedro murdered—and this sweet girl ravished—Oh! it is a fearful account, and fearfully shall it be balanced."

Could Piedras have seen his enemy at that moment, he would have been blasted by fear. Every separate nerve and muscle was working—his eye glared, rather than flashed—the veins on his temples were filled with streams of liquid fire—and upon each feature of his handsome face the mark of the Demon was stamped. With rapid strides he passed from the apartment, and no one saw him again until the morrow.

CHAPTER XII.

"For them no fortress can avail — the den
Of the poor reptile which preserves its sting
Is more secure than walls of adamant, when
The hearts of those within are quivering."

FIFTEEN or twenty adventurers were easily recruited in Western Texas for any service, by a leader so well known and so highly esteemed as Mustang Gray. On the fifteenth day, just as the sun went down, he rode up to the deserted huts he had appointed as the place of meeting Diego. Twilight, in that region, is of brief duration, and in less than thirty minutes darkness had spread its mantle over the earth. A bullet wrapped with threads of woollen yarn soaked in spirits of turpentine, was lighted and thrown far out into the river. No answering signal came from the opposite bank, but in a little while they observed something moving on the waters. It was Diego, swimming towards them.

"You came near being too late, Señor," he said. "Piedras is collecting all the cattle for the purpose, I suppose, of driving them to Matamoras or Monterey; and this morning he and Padre José were busily engaged packing their wardrobes."

"Then we have no time to lose."

Brief orders were issued to the men to enter the water two and two abreast, and a strong caution was added to keep their arms and ammunition dry.

While the adventurous band are struggling in the dark waters of the Rio Grande, let us turn to Bartolo Piedras. He had returned to his Hacienda a few days after the flight of

Gray, to find his prisoner gone, and the victim of his brutal appetite beyond his reach. Fierce and bitter were his execrations, and the frightened Peons shrank from his presence as from that of a wild beast. Then followed a stormy interview with the Priest, whom he taxed with carelessness and shameful inattention. If Gray alone had escaped, he might have suspected him of something worse; but he was too well acquainted with the Padre's secret vices to believe he would ever have connived at the escape of a young and lovely woman, while there was the remotest possibility of subjecting her to the gratification of his desires. He therefore acquitted him of all knowledge of their flight, and attributed the untoward circumstance solely to his negligence. The Priest was aware of the vantage-ground he occupied, and with the cunning of his tribe turned it to account. Pretending to grow warm and indignant in his turn, he gave Piedras to understand that Inez had applied to him for redress; that finding him reluctant to undertake the prosecution of so serious a charge against an old friend, she had doubtless bribed the sentry (who had disappeared on the same night), and was now safe in Texas.

"It was all your fault," he continued: "Why could you not wait until the arts of persuasion had been exhausted before resorting to other means. The girl was in your power — her father was dead — you were able to hold out inducements that few women in Mexico were ever able to resist. Patience and gentle pleading must have made her yours. The thunders of the law would have been silent, and the penalties of the church avoided. Your impatience has spoiled all. You have subjected yourself to heavy drags upon your purse, if nothing more, and imposed upon me the painful duty of reporting your conduct to the Alcalde and the Bishop."

"It strikes me, Father," answered Piedras, "that some proof will be required of my guilt; and, as Inez has gone, it will be hard to procure."

"Your remark is true, my son, if applied only to the courts of law; but the Church has its own means of wringing confessions from an offender."

Bartolo Piedras, who had been all his life in the habit of subjecting his passions to his interest, feeling that the game was against him, turned to the window to reflect how he could retreat from the contest most gracefully. The monk eyed him for a moment, then calmly undid the silver clasps of a richly bound volume, and seemed to be absorbed in the perusal of its contents. Piedras waited in vain for some sign or word to recall him. Padre Josè read on, and no one, to judge from his countenance, would have imagined that an agitating thought had crossed his mind for weeks. There is something in this cold impassiveness that oftentimes awes the boldest; and Bartolo Piedras cowered in the presence of the cowled Priest, whose life he knew to be as foul and black as his own. Turning from the window, he approached the table, and said, submissively,

"Forgive me, Father. I was much grieved at the failure of schemes I had deeply at heart. A few hasty words under such circumstances may well be excused."

"Forgiveness, my son, is the highest prerogative of the Church, and the most grateful to its ministers. Nevertheless, your offence has been great, and some penalty must be imposed. I'll think of it, in order that nothing may be done rashly. To-morrow or the next day will be time enough. For the present, you may depart."

Padre Josè knew himself a villain. Nay, more; he knew his auditor was perfectly aware of the same fact. But he knew also that, like other Catholics, Piedras always separated the Priest from the man, and that whatever came from him in his sacerdotal character was received with a superstitious reverence not at all diminished by the pollution of its source. The man might commit murder, robbery, adultery—what he chose—

the Priest was immaculate. To this is, to be in a great degree, attributed the fearful power the Catholic clergy have wielded in every age, and in every country. Another advantage they possess in moulding the vulgar mind, is that of always claiming to be better than others. When a virtue is assumed, and its appearance severely maintained, ninety-nine in a hundred will give full credit to its existence. A few may doubt, but they will not dare to question it, for fear of being charged in turn with malignity or envy. Who will believe that the subdued and passionless exterior — the slow and measured step — the low, unchanging voice — are all assumed to cloak the fiery passions within? Who dreams that the eye, which in public is always cast upon the ground, except when turned to heaven in pretended devotion, habitually gleams in secret with lust, or hate, or revenge? This is a credulous world, and the Priest who loses his saintly character, does so only because he is deficient in the first elements of hypocrisy. Padre Josè had been trained in a more perfect school. The crimes to which he was addicted were the very last of which he would have been accused. He was not one of those who

> "Compound for sins they are inclined to,
> By damning those they have no mind to."

On the contrary, he was never more severe in his denunciations of a particular vice than when he was fresh from its commission.

He watched the retreating form of Piedras until the door closed after him — then rising, paced the room in deep study. A servant entered to announce that supper was prepared for him.

"Tell your master that I shall spend this night in fasting and prayer. See that I am not disturbed."

The servant departed with this self-denying message. Padre Josè approached a crypt, and taking a key from his girdle,

applied it to the lock. From one of the shelves he took a bottle of wine, together with a huge pasty, made of beef, venison, and fat pork, stewed with onions, potatoes, and pepper-pods. Of this not unsavory dish (to a hungry man) he made a hearty meal, helping himself liberally to the wine in the intervals. Replacing the viands, he pressed the spring of a secret panel, which flew open at his touch. The small room he now entered was his Confessional, and the secret panel had been contrived for the purpose of conducting his fair penitents from the altar to an adulterous bed.

"It is near the hour," he muttered, "that I appointed to hear the confession of Felica. I trust she will not keep me waiting."

* * * * * * * *

A week later, Bartolo Piedras and Father Josè were seated in the Priest's chamber. There was a bottle of wine between them, though there was little appearance of conviviality on the brow of either. Whatever was the subject of their conference, it had left them both serious and silent.

"I like not Diego's absence," Piedras at length remarked. "What can he be after?"

"Some devil's work, to a certainty. I like him not. It would have been better to have tossed him into the Rio Grande with a stone about his neck, than to have brought him here, where he may do much mischief."

"Has he been making love to some of your especial favorites, reverend Father?"

"Son; your speech smacks of irreverence. My continence is known to every Ranchero on your estates."

"Better known to their wives and daughters, I suspect. But this is a profitless theme. I love the sparkle of a dark eye too well myself, to quarrel with you for a similar taste. Diego shall have a lesson, when he returns, that he will remember."

"If he ever returns," muttered the Priest, helping himself to another glass of wine.

At the same time, Mustang Gray and his hardy band were stemming the swift current of the Rio Grande. He soon possessed himself of all the information collected by Diego, and riding steadily on to within a quarter of a mile of the Hacienda, halted to conceal the horses in the bushes. It was arranged that Diego should approach the gate alone, and, when it was opened, stab the unsuspecting sentry to the heart. At a given signal, the party of Texans were then to rush on and secure the entrance. In accordance with this plan, Diego rode deliberately up to the gate, carelessly whistling the air of an old Spanish song. Dismounting from his horse, he roused the half-sleeping sentinel, and demanded admittance. Put the best-tempered man in the world on guard at the entrance to a fortified place — let him stand there one hour in the dark, and he will be almost certain to give a cross and surly answer to any application for admittance, however well he may be assured of the applicant's right to enter. There is in human nature a proclivity to do ungracious things, which is always developed at such a time: precisely as the chained cur will grin and show his teeth when he knows he cannot bite. Our sentry was no exception to the rule. He was in no hurry to remove the bars; and before he did so, sourly inquired what business had detained Diego from the Hacienda so late.

"You had better ask the Señor Piedras," replied the youth. "Perhaps he is in the habit of telling you his secrets?"

"No; he tells me no secrets, nor you either. In the morning, I may tell him one, by reporting at what hour you thought fit to return."

"I shall save you the trouble by reporting myself to-night. Open the gate. You have kept me here already longer than he will thank you for."

The confident tone and manner of Diego produced its effect.

The gate was thrown open, and the stripling, dropping the bridle-rein from his hand, buried a long knife to the hilt in the sentry's side. It needed no second blow. The man held to the gate for a moment with a convulsive grasp — then his fingers relaxed, and, staggering backward, he fell lifeless to the ground. A long, shrill whistle announced the success of the manœuvre, and in two minutes the Texans were in possession of the entrance.

The prolonged whistle which gave notice to Gray, served also as a warning to the inmates of the Hacienda. Piedras, who was still seated in the Priest's chamber, sprang instantly to his feet, to ascertain the cause of the unusual sound. Many of his retainers were astir, and arming themselves even before his impatient calls were heard. Laboring under the disadvantage of supposing the gate to be still closed and barred, they swarmed into the yard with torches and flambeaus, thus exposing themselves to a deadly fire, which swept away nearly one-third of their number. As usual, after the first round, the Texans discarded their rifles, drew their knives and revolvers, and rushed to a hand-to-hand encounter. The torches, thrown away by their bearers, now flickered upon the ground, affording an equal light to the combatants. For five minutes the conflict raged with a degree of ferocity only exhibited where men are fully aware that it is idle to expect or ask for quarter. Not a sound was heard but the ringing shot, and the clashing steel, save now and then a muttered curse, or a dying groan. The women and children had closed the doors, and in the extremity of their terror, forgot to wail. Rapidly the defenders were falling before the unerring marksmanship of the Rangers. The murderous scene was drawing to a close. Bartolo Piedras had been everywhere present in the thickest of the fight. He had seen one after another of his bravest men go down by his side, yet he was still unharmed. Placing himself at the head of the survivors, he made a desperate attempt to gain the gate,

and escape. A Ranger levelled a pistol at his bosom. It was thrown up by Mustang Gray.

"This fellow is my property, Ben. Practice ——"

The remainder of the sentence was cut short by a fierce lunge from Piedras. The keen blade was parried. Before he could recover, Gray had closed within his guard, and dealt him a blow on the forehead that made his senses reel. His object was to capture — not to slay his enemy. He had in store for him another fate than that of dying gallantly in open and manly encounter. When Piedras fell at his feet, a glance around assured him that the enclosure was cleared of living foes.

"Tie him, Diego," he said. "Tie him fast, hand and foot. I go to pay my respects to the Priest."

Followed by three of the men, he bounded towards the little apartment dedicated to the services of the Church. The door rudely thrown open, revealed a spectacle that awed even him, and made his fierce and lawless associates start back affrighted from the entrance. Padre Josè was kneeling before an altar lighted by two wax tapers, his arms crossed over his breast, his eyes raised reverentially to an image of the Virgin, and his lips moving in what seemed to be deep and earnest prayer. The rough entrance of his visitors did not interrupt his devotions. His whole attitude and bearing was that of one whose soul was communing with his God, and whom the evanescent things of earth had no power to disturb or annoy. There is something fearful in invading a sanctuary dedicated to the Most High, however base may be the purposes to which we know it has been prostituted. There is something peculiarly repugnant to the feelings in touching an anointed Minister of the Lord, however vile and despicable we may believe him to be. Mustang Gray felt the full force of this, and his step hesitated on the threshold. It was necessary to recall the story of Inez before he could shake off the feeling, and, laying his hand on the shoulder of the kneeling Priest, hiss in his ear:

"Up, Sir Priest. I have business with you."

The Monk rose with calm dignity and unaltered countenance.

"Who are you, that thus profane the Church of God, and interrupt the devotions of his servant?"

"Our acquaintance has been slight, it is true; but methinks, Reverend Sir, you might have remembered the features of Mustang Gray."

"An outlaw, a murderer, and I suppose I may now add, a robber. Away, man! you have sins enough to answer for, without adding sacrilege to the list."

"Hard words, Father; and, it may be, not altogether untrue. At least I am so sensible of my demerits that I propose to atone for them, in some degree, after the fashion of your Church, by roasting a couple of the most unmitigated scoundrels who ever disgraced the earth. Tie him," he continued, turning to his men. "We are wasting time."

Padre Josè stepped suddenly back on observing the men approach — elevated a large cross, which hung from his neck, and extended it towards them.

"By this sacred symbol, I charge you, stand off. This is a holy place, and he who profanes it shall be damned through all eternity."

No one ever suspected a Ranger of being troubled by religious scruples of any kind, still less of yielding to Catholic superstitions. But the air and manner of the Monk—his imposing attitude, heightened by the priestly vestments, added to the deep solemn tones of his voice, completely subdued them, and, notwithstanding the angry frowns of their leader, no one stirred to obey his behest.

"Fools! Have you turned women, that you cower before a base hypocrite like this? Give me the thongs."

Mustang Gray's iron grasp inclosed the arm of the Monk, and shook the cross from his hold; then, drawing his hands

forcibly backward, he secured them with raw-hide strips. The men, ashamed of the hesitation they had exhibited, now crowded around, and eagerly assisted in performing the like operation on his ancles.

"Let him lie there," was the next order. "Bring Bartolo Piedras, and lash them together."

The victor's attention was now directed to ascertaining exactly what were his own losses. He found that two had been killed outright, and several others more or less severely wounded. The duty of providing for the wounded he assumed himself. A party, under the supervision of Smith, were ordered to collect all the horses belonging to the Hacienda, and fit them with pack-saddles, while the remainder were to search all the rooms, for every article of value that could be carried away. Before all this was accomplished the sun had risen above the horizon, shining red and lurid through the smoky atmosphere, as if he anticipated the dreadful scene he was soon to witness. The horses were packed, and started on the return journey. Mustang Gray, and four others, remained to complete the work of destruction, and to protect the retreat of the detachment in charge of the plundered goods, in case a pursuit should be attempted. The women and children were allowed to collect such articles as they pleased of the plunder left by the Rangers, as too heavy, or of too little value for transportation. It was with no pleasant sensations that the leader of the Texans contemplated the sorrowful group; almost every one of whom had been made widows or orphans through his agency. This was a feature he had overlooked in the pursuit of his revenge, and, like many a conqueror before him, he found his pathway bedewed with tears that he had never dreamed of extracting from their secret fountains.

The surviving inmates of the Hacienda had departed. Bartolo Piedras, and Padre Josè, were the only living tenants that remained. Torches were procured, and the buildings fired in

many places. This done, Mustang Gray entered for the last time, the Chapel where Piedras and Josè were lying tied together on the floor.

"Bartolo Piedras," he began, "if you had only robbed and imprisoned me, and murdered my comrade, I should have been content to have fought out our quarrel hand to hand. But when in addition to these, you violated the person of a young girl on the very night her father died in your service, you committed a deed of damnable villany which requires a sterner retribution. And you, base Priest, although I have long known that your heart was as vile, and your character as deeply stained as that of your accomplice, yet when that orphan-girl appealed to you for protection and justice, if her prayer had been granted, you should have been permitted to go from this place unharmed and unmolested. As it was, you sought to convert her situation into the means of gratifying your own bestial desires; and now you must reap the reward. I have come to tell you that in five minutes, the flames will be bursting from as many different parts of this Hacienda, and that in a little while more you will have a foretaste of the hell to which you are doomed for an eternity of ages."

"Mercy, Señor," groaned both of them in concert. "For the love of God, have mercy!"

"Mercy! Did you show it to Inez? Mercy! for a couple of hell-hounds like you. Well, there is one mercy I will accord you. I will save you the suspense of waiting the approach of the flames from the other parts of the building."

So saying, he took a wax-taper from the altar where it was still burning, and applied it to the drapery. The blaze shot up almost to the ceiling — the wooden altar was speedily ignited, and throwing the burning taper on the floor, Mustang Gray strode from the room. Dreadful cries of agony and despair, which disturbed his midnight-dreams for many a year, followed his retreating steps. His fierce and reckless

associates pressed their hands upon their ears as they galloped away from the scene, to shut out the horrid sounds. None looked back, and none uttered a syllable until they reined up on the bank of the river. Here they found that the escort and the train of pack-horses had crossed over in safety. On the opposite bank they struck the trail, and followed it leisurely until near sunset, when they came in sight of the main body preparing for the night's encampment. From thence their marches to the San Antonio, though rapid, were attended with little apprehension. The country was entirely depopulated, and there was nothing to attract the roving bands of Camanches, at least in such numbers as to be able to cope with the present force of the Texans. The danger of pursuit from Mexico was also insignificant. Gray reasoned that the frightened women from the Hacienda of Piedras would greatly exaggerate his strength in their reports, and no party could be got together who would dare to cross the river under two or three days at the quickest. Still the booty they had gathered was rich and valuable, and prudence dictated that there should be no unnecessary delay on the journey.

The morning after their return, an equitable division was made of the captured property, and the Rangers for the most part departed for the towns, as was their custom, to squander the wealth they had acquired. A few only were induced to remain with Gray, who, fully aware of the consequences likely to follow on the heels of his late exploit, was preparing to meet them. Sam Houston had formerly been his friend; but from some cause, they had become estranged. It was, too, the settled policy of the President to conciliate the Mexican people — a policy he carried so far as to encourage their entrance into Texas, granting many of them "permits" to trade in the country. The burning of a large Hacienda, and the wholesale slaughter of its inhabitants, was therefore an act that was sure to arouse his most violent resentment. Accordingly, not many

days elapsed before Mustang Gray was favored with a proclamation denouncing him as an outlaw, and placing him beyond the protection of the authorities of Texas. At the same time, he received information that Caravajal was collecting a force of two or three hundred men for the avowed purpose of retaliation. Thus assailed by deadly enemies on the one side, and proclaimed an outlaw by the President of his own country on the other, his spirits rose with the difficulties that environed him; and never, during his whole career, was the sound judgment, the dauntless courage, and the tireless energy of his character more conspicuous. His first care was to strengthen, by every means in his power, the feeble fortifications of the Rancho. Dirt embankments were thrown up in each of the four corners of the palisades to within four feet of the top. From these points all the approaches were visible, and in case of an attack, each angle commanded two sides of the square. All the trees between the river and the Rancho were cut away, so that an enemy would be completely exposed to the fire of the garrison as soon as the stream was crossed. The roofs of the houses were covered with raw hides, to guard against fire. Additional loop-holes were cut, and blocks fitted into them. The well in the Rancho, which afforded only a scanty supply of water, was converted into a cistern, and the female servants busily employed in filling it from the San Antonio. Large numbers of cattle were slaughtered, and the flesh jerked and dried. Messengers were dispatched to every point where he thought a recruit could be raised; and finally, he wrote to John Allison, for large supplies of powder, lead, and percussion caps. These were not only promptly furnished, but that tried and faithful friend abandoned his business, collected a number of his acquaintances, and proceeded in person to the assistance of the companion of his early days.

In all Gray's preparations, Inez had borne an active and laborious part. It was in vain he remonstrated — in vain he

insisted that she was encountering needless fatigue, which her slight frame was ill calculated to bear.

"It is on my account," she replied, "that you have incurred this peril. I know I cannot do much, but I must do something to assist you in overcoming it."

"You are mistaken, Senorita. It is true I scorched the Priest on your account, but I should have killed Bartolo Piedras, whenever I met him, on my own."

Finding it useless to dissuade her, he assigned her light tasks, such as involved no fatigue.

In two weeks, the Rancho was placed in the best possible condition for defence, and thirty fearless Borderers had gathered within it, who would not have shrunk from defending that slight post against the grand army of Napoleon.

"Now let Caravajal make his appearance," he exclaimed; "and let Sam Houston issue his commands to all 'law-abiding citizens' to stand by and see me murdered, without lifting a finger in my defence. They shall find that Mustang Gray is able to defend himself. And by the living God, the Mexican robber had better keep his own Hacienda well guarded, for my next expedition beyond the Rio Grande shall be directed against him, secure as he deems himself."

For days there was no appearance of an enemy. A scout was sent out in the direction of the old Mission of Refugio. At nightfall, he returned, and reported that he had been chased by a body of Mexicans, whose numbers he had failed to ascertain.

"They will not attack us before morning," was the commentary of Gray. "Let us to supper, and then to sleep."

The grey light of the morning was just beginning to be tinged with the rosy hues of the rising sun, when a sentry called out that the Mexicans were crossing the river three hundred yards to the northward. Gray ascended the embankment to observe in person the movements and disposition of his enemy.

It was as motley a troop as the eye of a soldier ever looked upon. Some wore buckskin pantaloons, on which rows of round, jingling buttons, extended from the hips to the ankles. Some had their small-clothes adorned with braided figures of birds and beasts, worked in colors of crimson and yellow. Others had the outward seam split open, and loosely laced, to reveal the white cotton drawers underneath. Some wore coats of one pattern, some of another; and some were entirely without that useful article of dress. The cheap sashes, worn around the waist to sustain the pantaloons instead of suspenders, were as variegated as the colors of the rainbow. The saddles of some were richly mounted, and their bridles glittered with silver ornaments. Others, again, rode Spanish trees, without padding, and nothing over the seat but a hard strip of untanned leather. To make the medley more complete, one or two were dressed in American costume, plundered, no doubt, from some murdered man. Three or four officers in the gorgeous uniform of Mexico rode among them, and seemed to direct their movements.

Their weapons were as motley as their dress. Lances, escopetas, muskets, swords, pistols, and short axes, to hew down the palisades, were distributed with such an undiscriminating hand, that no ten of them were armed alike. Gray counted the files while they were passing from the wood into the open Prairie.

"There are more of them," he said; "a dozen Indians could drive that rabble gang back to Mexico. Caravajal would never trust himself so far from home, unless he was supported by better soldiers than these."

His conjecture was soon verified. Another body was discovered crossing the river to the south, and still another occupied the woods of the river-bottom on the west.

Caravajal had often visited the Rancho while it was the property of Bartolo Piedras. Of the defences that had been

since added, he knew nothing. His plan was to assail it on three sides at once, and so distract the attention and divide the forces of the little garrison, that an entrance would be effected on one side or the other. He had read the proclamation of Houston, and giving it the same force that would have attached to it in Mexico, he confidently expected to find Gray without other support than the ordinary inmates of the Rancho. He little knew the free rovers of that wild border. Not one in ten had ever read the proclamation, and *not one* would have paid the slightest attention to the mandates of a thousand such documents unless it happened to chime with his own particular humor. Fighting was their vocation; and the idea of refraining from so favorite an amusement at the bidding of any civil officer, however high his station, was so great an absurdity, that they were more disposed to regard it as an indifferent hoax, than a matter of serious import. Law was with them an obsolete word; and they submitted to no control save that which was necessary to their military efficiency. The Highlanders of Scotland had their hereditary chieftains, whose lightest word was implicitly obeyed. The Ranger of the Prairie had no superior except the officer who was for the time being in command. When the objects of an expedition were accomplished, he was on a footing of perfect equality with his commander. He was free to stay or go — to select another leader, or to set up for a leader himself. Thus it often happened that the captain of to-day was a private in the ranks to-morrow. All this was so perfectly understood, that no jealousy or heart-burning ever followed. Whoever planned a foray was its commander, unless he voluntarily gave way to some one who knew the country better, or had greater experience than himself. The subordinate officers were elected by the men.

Accustomed to act precisely as they pleased—to go when and where they chose, the proclamation of the President was es-

teemed by them as of no greater value than the paper on which it was printed. Thus Caravajal was grievously deceived in the most important of his calculations.

The three divisions of the enemy were soon formed in their respective positions, and the little band of Americans were as promptly distributed, so as to offer the most effectual resistance. There was an inactivity in the Mexican lines, which indicated that they were waiting for an expected signal. At length a bugle-note sounded shrill and clear from the wood. The attacking forces advanced simultaneously to the assault, firing, as was their custom, at such long distances, that the shot did no more than break the bark on the hard logs of which the palisades were made. This was repeated three or four times. No answering echo came from the palisades. Still as the crouching panther, the little garrison waited the word of command. Gray, in the mean time, was standing on the embankment at the south-western angle; nearly one-half of his tall form exposed to the fire from two sides at once. Beckoning John Allison to him, he said,

"Scatter your men a little more, John. I want every shot to tell. There is no use in putting two bullets into one Greaser."

The enemy on the west side had not attempted to cross the river. Here Caravajal commanded in person; and from this point he intended the decisive attack should be made. His other two divisions had steadily advanced to within thirty yards of the Rancho. Now was the time. Loud and clear as the tones of a cathedral-bell on a still night in winter, rang the voice of Mustang Gray:

"Take aim — Fire!"

A dozen rifles protruded through the loop-holes on either side, and as many messengers of doom sped upon their angry way.

Leaping from the embankment, he shouted to his Lieutenants,

"Keep it up, Mason! Keep it up, John! I will take care of these gentry over the river."

Satisfied that all that prudence and courage could do would be effected, Gray paid no further attention to the firing on the right hand or the left. His whole attention was directed to the body in front, who had left the cover of the trees and were plunging into the river, led on, or rather driven on, by Caravajal in person.

"Now we have them!" he shouted. "In two minutes, the waters of the San Antonio will bear a redder color — Fire!"

The well-directed volley that instantly followed the stern order, told with terrible effect. The dying were swept down the stream; but the living still struggled towards the eastern bank. Although staggered by the shock, the Mexicans, confident in their superior numbers, continued to advance. Another fatal volley of rifle-bullets broke them into scattered groups. Again their ranks were re-formed, and, yelling fiercely, they rushed up to the guarded palisades. On the part of the defenders, the rifle was now dropped for want of time to reload—Colt's pistol took its place. No troops ever recruited in Mexico could have stood two minutes before the fire of revolvers that was opened upon them. Pale and terror-stricken, they fled for the shelter of the trees. In their haste they huddled and stumbled over each other in the river, and, shallow as the water was, many an unwounded corse floated down the stream.

On the two other sides, the repulse had been equally decisive. Again ascending the embankment, and discovering they were flying in hopeless confusion, Gray resolved to deal yet another blow. Directing John Allison to remain with ten men to guard the Rancho, he ordered the others to saddle their horses and follow. In little more time than it takes to record it, they were dashing out of the gate at headlong speed. Crossing the river at the usual ford, and following the beaten path through the bottom, they had not proceeded more than

half a mile, before they discovered a division of the enemy unfastening the horses they had tied there before beginning the assault. The Mexicans were too much panic-stricken to think of resistance, and a scene of awful butchery followed. A few succeeded in making their escape; but far the greater part were remorselessly slaughtered where they stood. Mustang Gray sought in vain among the bloody corpses for that of Caravajal. That wily chief was beyond his reach. He had watched the conflict from his position on the western bank of the river; and, as soon as he discovered that the fortunes of the day were against him, turned his horse's head, and rode away from the fatal spot. The eagerness of the Texans to capture their arch-enemy, induced them to continue the pursuit for several miles, though with little hope of success. At length, their Captain reluctantly reined up.

"It won't do, boys. He is gone for this time. By taking a turn to the south, it is almost certain that we shall meet another detachment of his flying troops; and, if we can do nothing more, we can weaken him by cutting his *hell-cats* to pieces."

At the word, they wheeled in the direction indicated, moving slowly and steadily, to keep their horses as fresh as possible. It was not long before they discovered a considerable troop on the prairie, riding in great disorder, almost directly towards them. There had been no effort to reunite the separate divisions of the Mexicans. Their commander had fled, and each one sought his own safety in his own way. The troop now approaching were unaware that any pursuit had followed their flight; still less did they imagine that, by taking a near path through the river bottom, their relentless foes had placed themselves in front. Under the impression that it was a party of their own men, who had from some cause been left behind, they continued to advance.

"What do they mean, Captain?" inquired a stout Ranger

of Gray: They surely are not such infernal fools as to think of charging us!"

There was no need of a reply; for the Mexicans had discovered their mistake, and, wheeling their horses, fled in all directions over the broad Prairie. Their jaded steeds, wearied by the long journey they had performed, were poorly able to maintain a race against the stronger and fresher animals of the Rangers. One by one they were ridden down — one by one their riders were stretched upon the plain. The carnage was over. The few that remained were not worth pursuit. The horses, saddles, and blankets of the dead were collected, and with these, which constituted a rich booty, the victorious Texans returned to the Rancho an hour before the sun went down.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Ours the wild life in tumult still to range
From toil to rest, and joy in every change."

ANOTHER phase is about to be exhibited in the character of the remarkable man whose history we are writing. For years he had been gradually acquiring a taste for ardent spirits, and, in the intervals of his numerous expeditions, drank deeply. Whenever he visited a town, either in Mexico or Texas, he was sure to load at least one pack-horse with small casks of intoxicating liquors. It mattered little to him what it was — whiskey, muscal, brandy — anything, as he expressed it, that would make the blood flow more freely; or, in the rude, though expressive phraseology of one of his comrades, "Anything that would make drunk come." In this way he had collected a very considerable supply; the largest,

ear, and a proud smile would light his visage while the death-dew was standing on his brow. Driven by various causes from the great Republic — no longer protected by its laws, perhaps obnoxious to them — their souls were still dwelling among its lofty mountains, on its broad savannahs, or by its mighty streams. There, and there alone, was HOME. There alone the pride of the past and the hope of the future centered. Every wind that had swept over its fields was laden with incense, and every sound that echoed from its shores fell like music on the exile's ears. In none was the love of their native land more strongly marked than in Mustang Gray — none hugged its glory to his bosom with a fonder clasp — in the wildest and the maddest of his revels, the toast he had now given was ever the first on his lips. Once, on the Brasos, a Scotchman had refused to drink when it was given. The next day the sun shone on a low mound of earth of that peculiar form which tells that a human body reposes beneath.

The clamorous applause that followed Gray's toast had in some degree subsided, and most of the company had resumed their seats, when a smooth-cheeked youth, whose name was Burton, spoke in a clear ringing voice,

"I suppose that according to the rules of war, it will be my turn to give the next sentiment."

"What rules of war?" asked two or three at once.

"The rule regulating Courts Martial; and the practice in Councils of war. In both, the opinion of the youngest is taken first, in order that old fogies may have the benefit of all that can be urged by men of sense, before their own opinions are asked."

"Reasoned like a Solomon," replied his questioner. "Give us the sentiment."

"Not yet. I am about to prove that young as I am, it is no idle boast to claim more prudence and discretion than all of you together. In this scope of country, as you may possibly

know, dishes and glass things generally, or even wooden bowls and trays, are not as plentiful as musquitoes and Prairie-flies. I beg to suggest therefore, that, before we take another drink, Diego and the two beauties he has helping him, remove every thing from this table except the brandy and water; otherwise it is my opinion that Mustang's crockery will be remarkably scarce in the morning."

To a suggestion so reasonable, there could of course be no dissenting voice — the dishes were removed — Burton rose to his feet, and calling for full bumpers, proceeded to redeem his pledge.

"I give you, gentlemen, our host, Mustang Gray, who never failed a friend or foe — may he never want for either."

"By the Lord, Will," exclaimed Gray, when the cups were emptied, "it is a better wish than I could have made for myself. If I was near enough, I would hug you."

"Thank you! But I had rather be excused. They tell me that your gripe is something of the roughest, and I don't care about being cramped by anything stronger than a pretty girl's arms."

Toast followed toast in rapid succession, and jest and song lent their aid to swell the mad revelry of the hour. In the midst of their merriment, the storm that had long been gathering burst overhead. A sheet of lightning flashed through the open door so bright, so vivid, that the torches burned pale and dim, and many a strong hand held the cup suspended half-way to the lip. It was followed by a peal of thunder that shook the building to its foundation. There was a pause of awe — the tribute man involuntarily pays to the majesty of nature. The silence, that had lasted until it became painful, was broken by Mustang Gray:

"Fill, boys. We have heard thunder before. Here is Cameron who looks as if he was chief mourner at a funeral."

"I was thinking," replied the individual thus addressed,

"that the poor fellows who escaped from us to-day will have a hard time on the Prairie to-night."

"Do you think," asked another, "they would have fared any better if they had fallen into our hands?"

"Well, yes. They would have been out of trouble; and as I don't think the creatures have any souls, about the best thing they can do is to die."

"I hope," put in Burton, "that they have souls to be damned at least, if they have none to be saved."

"In that case, Will, you will have a fair chance to keep bad company through all eternity; for if there is any one of my acquaintance to whom the Devil has a clear bill of sale, it is you."

"John Cameron, I hope his majesty, the Prince of darkness, will remember that speech when he comes to settle your final account. I appeal to you, Mustang, is it not a vile slander upon so respectable a gentleman as the Devil, to insinuate that he has no better taste than to pitch a d—n–d Greaser into the same brimstone bath with a Free Rover of the Prairie?"

During the utterance of this appeal, the countenance of Burton wore an air of grave solemnity, that added greatly to its ludicrous effect. The speech, like the sallies of all favorites, was greeted by prolonged applause. Cameron joined heartily in the laugh against himself.

"I give it up, Will," he said, "I give it up; and as a penalty, I will sing you a song."

Without waiting for a reply, he sang, with great spirit and power, the favorite air of Burton:—

"With a helmet on his head,
A sabre on his thigh,
The soldier mounts his gallant steed,
To conquer or to die."

The storm in the meantime was raging with a terrible fury unknown to colder climes. In the latitudes of the far South,

the thunder makes its home — and the lightning, now marking the heavens with long, jagged lines of fiery light; now coming in broad flashes that almost sear the eyeballs of the beholder, spreads terror and dismay through all animated creation. The wind, too, sweeps on its unseen path, not in fitful gusts, but in one strong, continuous blast, bending the long grass of the Prairie flat to the earth; and when it mingles with the trees, sending forth a roar like that of many lions hungering for their prey. A storm among the mountains derives a portion of its awful grandeur from the giant landmarks and hoary rocks among which it rages. The roaring billows add their terrors to a tempest on the ocean. It is upon the plains alone that the elemental war is witnessed in all its unaided sublimity. There alone we feel its might, and tremble alternately at the rushing wind, the flashing lightning, and the deep-toned thunder. The storm-king is recognized there in all his majesty and power; but even while he palsies the frame with terror, he sends the genius of admiration to lift the soul from the tiny things of earth to the wonders of the great I Am.

It was such a night — a night, once witnessed, never to be forgotten — but still the wild revel went on in that low room of the San Antonio Rancho. Still laugh, and song, and jest, mingled with the roaring wind and the booming thunder. It was a strange company, and strange, too, appeared their taste in music. Now, a dark-browed, grizzly-bearded man, whose face was disfigured by a deep scar from the forehead to the lip, is singing "Love's Young Dream." Another, dressed in the rudest vestments of the Border, calls for "The Last Rose of Summer." Another sings, in soft and melting tones, "Good Bye." Another begins "The Star-Spangled Banner." Every man rises to his feet as the patriotic melody fills the room, and every voice joins the stirring chorus,

> "'Tis the star-spangled banner, oh! long may it wave,
> O'er the land of the free, and the home of the brave."

Not a coarse, not an unchaste song was asked for, or thought of — nor did an obscene jest pass their lips — nor in their language (apart from some unnecessary swearing), could a syllable be detected of vulgarity. Strange inconsistency, the reader may say, as others have said before him. Yet it was not so strange either. The Borderers of Texas were no common men. Many of them had mingled in the most polished circles of the States. Almost all of them had the advantage of a liberal education. Not a few were members of the learned professions. A wild spirit of adventure had carried some to the outskirts of civilization. An unlucky turn of Fortune's wheel had driven others. Some were pressed by debt — some had been unfortunate in their love affairs — and some, in a moment of mad passion, had used the pistol or the knife more freely than was allowable under the laws of their native land. From whatever cause they went, they carried their accomplishments with them, and only allowed them to slumber, because they found that a strong arm and a bold heart were far more useful in repelling an Indian or a Mexican incursion than all the philosophy of the schools and all the refinements of a court. To the charges of blood-thirstiness, and reckless disregard of the rights of property, it is a sufficient answer to say that their virtues were their own — their faults were the faults of the times and the country. Since peace has spread her mantle over that then distracted land, these same men have adorned every society in which they moved. At the bar, on the bench, in the medical profession, in legislative assemblies, in the representative hall and senate chamber of the Union, they have met in equal lists the most distinguished names that adorn our history, and won honor from the encounter. The destiny that was before them was unknown to themselves, as to the world; and they gave themselves up to the excitement of the hour, forgetful of the past, and regardless of the future

Cameron concluded his song, and rose to claim a privilege as old as the days of our Saxon ancestors:

"It is my turn now to call for a song, a toast, or a story. I 'knock down' Mustang Gray, and claim the story of his game of *monte* with St. Iago de Garza."

The rules of the festive board are as absolute as those of an emperor; and Gray, knowing that opposition would be fruitless, responded at once.

"Well, boys, you shall have it. Push that jug this way, Mason. The story is a dry one, and I shall get thirsty before I am through.

"About eleven months ago," he went on, "I was in San Felipe, on a trading speculation. Trade was dull; my goods went off slowly, and my time hung heavily upon my hands. It was not long before I learned that St. Iago de Garza had come into the town, protected by one of Old Sam's d—n–d trafficking 'permits,' and had established a *monte bank* for the amusement of the citizens. I had seen the game often, though I had never played at it. Gambling was a new field, and I had a notion that there was considerable fun to be seen in exploring it. Besides, I wanted something to do. The first night I lost a little. The second it was the same. The third I beat him; so that, altogether, we were pretty nearly even. In the mean time, I had Diego, who I believe was born with a pack of cards in his hand, explaining to me all the rules of the game, and showing to me all the tricks by which I could be cheated. Having thus become a proficient, as I thought, I took my whole pile, and made for St. Iago's den. There were ten or twelve *betters* about the table. My stakes, however, were the largest, and the *dealer* favored me with particular attention. From the first, I lost rapidly. Stake after stake disappeared. I knew that he was cheating me, though I could not for the soul of me detect the manner in which it was done. Diego's lessons were of no avail. At last I was reduced to twenty-

three dollars. Drawing my stool a little back from the table, I complained of being tired, and said that I believed I would quit for a while.

"'As you please, Captain,' blandly said the gambler.

"My object was to watch him more closely than I could do while under the excitement of betting. Very soon I made out the secret. He had been playing 'the slipping trick' on me. You have heard of the patience of a hungry cat waiting at a mouse-hole for the appearance of its victim; but let me tell you that nothing of the feline species ever exhibited half so much of that useful quality as I did, until I got a chance, while his head was turned away, to *borrow* a card from his deck When this was secured, I whispered Diego to go and bring Saxon, and to tell John Allison that I wanted five hundred dollars. John came in person. It was the first and last time, I reckon, that he ever entered a gambling-room. He took me to the door, and tried to dissuade me from betting. I told him I had the thing *dead*, and must have the money. Reluctantly he forked it over. I stood about, keeping my eye on the cards, until the 'lay out' came — queen — tray.

"'What is your limit?' I asked.

"'I have no limit, Captain. I take anything you choose to bet.'

"'Then hold on a minute.'

"Walking to the door, where Diego was holding Saxon, I mounted and rode him in.

"'Now value horse, clothes, all the money I have about me, and the rider.'

"Do n't you think, the scoundrel had the impudence to value Saxon at only two hundred and fifty dollars, when all the money he had in his bank could not have bought him. My clothes—the best suit I had—he put down at two dollars and a half. The money, he said, would count for itself; and as for the rider, he estimated him at *nothing at all;* because, if

he won, his title would be worthless; the devil having a valid mortgage upon me already. The cool impudence of the fellow pleased me, and I replied at once,

"'I stand to your valuation. The game is made. Rise, Saxon, and put your foot on the tray.'

"A slight motion of the bridle directed him, and, rearing up, the noble animal placed his forefoot directly on the indicated card.

"'So, ho, boy. Stand where you are. Don St. Iago, you can turn on.'

"Several turns of the cards were made. The spectators held their breath, while, but for the flashing of his eyes and the swelling of his nostrils, Saxon and I might have been taken for an equestrian statue. Another turn, and up comes the tray. I had won! The players, who had suspended their own game to watch what they considered my desperate venture, made the rafters ring with their shouts.

"'Down, Saxon!' I said; 'down, sir, and let us collect the funds.'

"As I am a living sinner, he dropped from the counter without the slightest further direction from me, and, walking up to St. Iago's chair, halted, as if he understood the whole thing as well as I did. The Mexican pulled out the two hundred and fifty-two dollars and a half, at which he had valued my horse and clothes, and said, in an indifferent tone,

"'Well, Captain, you have won. Let us count your money.'

"After fumbling in my pockets for some time, to keep him in suspense, the twenty-three dollars he had left me in the earlier part of the game were produced, and thrown upon the table.

"'Any more?'

"'Yes, a little;' and pulling off my sombrero, the five hundred dropped out before him.

"To do the Mexican justice, he took it coolly, and paid the

money without a word. The boys raised another yell, which was only quieted by my calling for 'liquors all 'round,' including Saxon. My drink was a *rouser*. The boys followed suit, and Saxon put a half basin of brandy and water under his girth with as much gusto as the rest. John Allison took me by the arm, and telling the horse to follow, we walked towards his store. We had not gone more than twenty yards before he stopped, and looked me full in the face.

"'Do you know, Mabry,' he said, 'that I believe you are crazy?'

"'No, I did not know it, John; though I do know that sober people are very apt to think so at times. But tell me what crazy thing I have done just now.'

"'I could understand,' he went on, 'your risking all the money you could raise. I could understand your risking your clothes, or even yourself, for I have heard that such a thing is common in Mexico; but that you should risk Saxon on the turn of a card, when I know that you would at any time shed blood to procure him a single feed, is something I cannot comprehend, except upon the supposition that your wits are deserting you.'

"'I did not risk him.'

"'Why, I saw and heard it myself.'

"'Nevertheless, there was no risk. St. Iago had no earthly chance to win.'

"'Why not? He had been winning from you all night. Why not win from you again?'

"'Well, John, if you must know the secret, you shall have it; though, as you never play *monte*, it will be of no great value to you. St. Iago had beaten me, I believed, by swindling, and I quit the game purposely to watch him. When I detected the trick by which I had been cheated, my first impulse was to plant my knife between his ribs; but a happier thought suggested itself. One of the rules of the game is,

that the dealer is responsible for the presence of all the cards in the deck, because he alone selects the pack; and if one is wanting, the presumption is, that he has taken it out to profit by its absence. Therefore, if a card is missing, he cannot win. It occurred to me to take advantage of this rule; and Diego was sent for Saxon, and also to you for money. I had beforehand managed unobserved to slip a card from his deck. It was the tray of diamonds. I had now only to wait until a tray was one of the cards laid out. As soon as this happened, I staked everything upon it. If I had lost, I should have called for a count, which would have shown that there were but three trays in the pack, for that tray of diamonds is in my stomach now, and from the way it feels, I believe it will stay there for a month. So you see, John, Saxon was in no danger of changing owners; and, if he had, he would have broken the d—n—d Greaser's neck in less than a week, and come back of his own accord.'

"John looked as if he admired the ingenuity rather more than he applauded the morality of the transaction; but from that day to this, he has never hinted a suspicion that my brain was addled.

"Now, gentlemen," he continued, rising, and filling his cup, "I give you, John Allison — Kind-hearted as a woman, in danger's hour no man ever yet knew his blood to run cold or slow."

The sentiment was cordially received, for all knew the sterling worth of the man, and recognised the truth of the picture his friend had drawn.

Hours went by like minutes. The wild storm without had abated — not so the wild revel within. It was after midnight when Mustang Gray again rose, and commanding silence, addressed them as follows:

"Friends and comrades — Colonel Caravajal has this day paid us a visit. I propose to return the courtesy. His Ha-

cienda stands within a league of the Rio Grande, and is said to be the richest on its waters. How many of you will join me in an excursion to smite the smiter, and spoil the spoiler, in his turn?"

"All; all of us," promptly responded the men.

"Then it is settled. Meet me here this day month. In that time I will undertake to provide all that is needful. Your health, comrades, and the health of Col. Caravajal, *until I meet him.*"

Near daylight Burton discovered that he was the only one of the company able to hold up his head. Some were leaning their foreheads on the table. Some had fallen from their seats, and were snoring on the dirt floor. Another had tumbled into his neighbor's lap. And yet another had propped himself against the wall of the room. Tin and horn cups, stone jugs, and leathern bottles, in every position it was possible for such utensils to assume, covered the table. Two or three of the sleepers still held their drinking cups firmly clenched in their brawny hands. Burton gazed about him in drunken astonishment.

"Curse me," he muttered, "if there aint more fellows here than when we began. There's twice as many lights too as there was, and yonder's two Mustang Grays. I never thought there was room enough in this country for more than *one*, and devil take me if I think there is yet. Stop, let me think." After a pause he continued: "That's it. I'm drunk. Drunk as hell. There's no doubt about it. Well, I'll get a blanket, and sleep it off."

He tried to rise — it was in vain. Resting both hands on the table, he made a more successful effort. At the first step towards the door, his knees gave way, and he fell heavily to the ground. A few ineffectual attempts to rise, convinced him that it was useless. Gently he sank back to his mother

earth, repeating in the true spirit of philosophy the old adage, "what can't be cured, must be endured."

Mustang Gray was the first in the morning to raise his head from the table on which it was leaning. For some time he was unable to remember where he was, or to recall the events of the preceding night. When it did flash upon him, he stepped carefully over the bodies of his sleeping comrades, walked to the horse-trough, which had been filled to overflowing by the copious rain, and, divesting himself of his upper garments, thoroughly bathed his head, neck, arms, and breast in the cooling element. Refreshed and invigorated by the process, he returned to the house to rouse the Rangers from the heavy torpor that had followed their drunken carouse. While their ablutions were going on, he ordered Diego to prepare an immense "hot stew," well seasoned with spice, ginger, and butter — very little water, and not too much sugar. Breakfast followed soon after — the substantial breakfast of the frontier — and in less than an hour, it would have been impossible to tell that any one of them had participated in the reckless debauch of the previous night. After breakfast the captured booty was equitably divided. Each one arranged his own pack — saddled his own horse, took a parting drink, and rode off to dispose of his property to the Merchants and Traders of the interior towns.

Immediately on the departure of his friends, Mustang Gray dispatched a spy to the Rio Grande to learn, if possible, all the movements of Caravajal — to ascertain the strength of his Hacienda, and to report what number of retainers were usually within its walls. He went himself in charge of the male Peons attached to Josefa's Rancho, to remove the dead Mexicans so far down the river, that the stench would not be offensive. The females had it in charge to collect all the short axes the Mexicans had dropped in their precipitate flight. These instruments he foresaw would be of great advantage in

his meditated foray, and he gave particular instructions that the search for them should be careful and diligent.

The labors of the day were over, and the evening meal concluded. Gray, as usual, accompanied Josefa and Inez to their apartment. There he took a blanket, spread it on the floor, and threw himself upon it to play with the children. All three were immediately upon him, pressing their little fingers into his eyes, pulling his hair, and tickling his sides — his pretended exclamations of pain calling forth the while peals of childish laughter. Now he would stretch out his arm and let them get astride of it to "ride horse." Then he would place his open hand on the floor, and telling the oldest to step into it, would lift him up until his head touched the ceiling. Again he would fall on the blanket, and catching them in his arms hold them tightly for a few seconds; gradually loosening his hold so that they could slip out from his grasp, when the little fellows imagining that they were freed by their own exertions, would dance, and clap their hands, and shout, "Oh! you could'nt hold us, Sir. You could'nt hold us." Incomprehensible man! Whoever had seen him yesterday in the thunder of the battle, or the fury of the pursuit, would have sworn that he was a Devil incarnate. He who had seen him last night in the midst of the mad revel, and listened to his songs, his jests, and his stories, would have pronounced him the jolliest of boon companions. He who had seen him to-day raising dead bodies in his arms, and throwing them into a cart as indifferently as if they were so many hogs, to be hauled off and left on the bare ground to feed the wolves and vultures, would have said that he was cold, merciless, and unfeeling as the hyena. He who had seen him this night rolling on the floor, playing with the children, apparently the happiest of the group, would have imagined that he was the most inoffensive and guileless of his species. Yet was he none of these,

"His heart was formed for softness — warped to wrong;
Betrayed too early, and beguiled too long."

The knowledge of a single trait lends little aid to the study of character. Indeed, it more often misleads than enlightens. Those who undertake to read the human heart have many a hard lesson to con, many an inconsistency to reconcile. Often, very often, we must rise from the study wearied and worn, with the sad conviction of a Philosopher of the olden time, that "the most we know is, that nothing can be known." Temptation may sway, sorrow may warp, and wrong may utterly change the whole nature of the firmest. He who has a secret sorrow gnawing at his heart-strings (and what sorrow that deserves the name is not secret?) can never calculate upon his own actions—still less can they be calculated by others. The grief may be hidden — nay, it *will be* hidden; for the heart that can feel a wound instinctively shrinks from its exposure; but still it lives, and acts, and drives its victim on, forever seeking some new occupation, or some new excitement, that will bring the boon of forgetfulness. Oh! why is there no Lethe upon earth, to which the wretched may repair, and drink, "and remember their misery no more?"

The children were dismissed to bed, and Gray took a seat between Josefa and Inez. The conversation was long and earnest. He communicated his determination to attack the Hacienda of Caravajal, and combated the objections they urged against it.

"We can never sleep in security," he said, "until his wings are effectually clipped. He may collect another rabble, and pounce upon us at any time. I may not always have timely notice, or, even if I do, the boys may be off upon some expedition, and we shall have to defend the Rancho with the feeble force that is here. It is for our safety that I go, more than for revenge; though I will not deny that I am thirsting to meet him face to face. where none can interpose between us."

"You are determined to have your own way, my son, and I will not oppose you. Oh! how I wish these broils and troubles were at an end. I cannot sleep soundly when you are away. I do not know what has happened to you, and I am forever dreaming of seeing you brought home in a bloody blanket."

"Who," she continued, "did you send to the Rio Grande? Not Diego, for I saw him this evening."

"No: I could not trust him. Wilson volunteered to go, and there is no better scout on the border."

"Has Diego done anything to incur your suspicions?"

"If he had, he would have been swinging from the first tree in the river bottom. My decision was made on the ground of what he might do. I could trust him where Bartolo Piedras was concerned, because he hated him with a deadly hate. I had no fears of the influence of Padre Josè over him, because the Priest had dishonored his sister; and although I am sure he never cared for the girl, yet she *was* his sister, and he felt bound to avenge her. But he does not hate Caravajal, and has no complaints against the Priest who is domiciliated with him. If he resisted Caravajal's efforts to extract the truth from him, his superstitious reverence for everything connected with the Catholic Church would still make him yield to the arguments of the Monk; and my spy would become my betrayer. But we must talk no more to-night. It is getting late, and you need repose."

Imprinting a kiss on the forehead of each, he bade them "good-night," and sought the solitude of his own room.

CHAPTER XIV.

"I little thought, when first thy rein
I slacked upon the banks of Seine,
That highland eagle e'er should feed
On thy fleet limbs, my matchless steed;
Wo worth the chase, wo worth the day,
That costs thy life, my gallant grey."

SINCE the night of his escape from the Hacienda of Bartolo Piedras, there had been little intercourse between Mustang Gray and the fair companion of his flight. Absorbed by other and sterner duties, his conversations with her had been confined to the brief periods during which they were thrown together at meal-time. Now, however, he had a season of comparative leisure. No important step could be taken until the return of his spy, and the time thus thrown upon his hands was devoted almost exclusively to her. Evening after evening, they wandered forth to pluck the wild flowers of the Prairie, or stroll among the embowering trees that shaded the beautiful San Antonio. It was a dangerous intercourse for her. The manly form — the extraordinary beauty of feature — the low voice, soft and musical as her own, were enough of themselves to captivate the fancy and win the admiration of a young and romantic girl. The tender and respectful courtesy of his manner added another charm, and admiration was fast ripening into love. She would sit for hours, and listen to him dwell upon the beauty of the far land where his earlier years had been passed. She heard him describe the towering pines and the low moan of the wind sighing through them, until she fancied she could see their giant forms, and hear the lullaby

murmuring among their tops. With all the enthusiasm of his character, he spoke of the freedom and happiness of the people. He drew for her the picture of a Government where the people feared no outrage, and the law was strong enough to avenge every wrong — where war dared not set his iron foot, and internal dissension was unknown.

"Why, oh, why!" she inquired, "did you leave a paradise like that for the dark and terrible scenes that are of almost daily occurrence here?"

"Ah! Inez," he replied, while a cloud gathered on his brow, "it is rare in this world that we are permitted to choose our own lot. Be assured, I did not willingly leave my native land, nor did I willingly become the thing I am."

"Become the thing you are! Kind, generous, noble, brave.—What is there in that to bring reproach or regret?"

"Much. There is much both to regret and reproach, even if your flattering picture was true. But pardon me for saying that I have no partiality for conversation of which I am myself the theme. Let us change the subject, and do you in turn describe the lands you have visited."

"I have lived in no country but Western Louisiana, and a part of that along the Rio Grande. I can tell you nothing you do not know of these."

"Not much. I am sufficiently familiar with the swamps and bayous of the one, and the sterile wastes of the other. But if you have not seen, you have heard. Your father has doubtless repeated to you the legends of Old Spain, and you have heard him describe the beetling crags and the lonely glens, from which the daring guerillas watched the armies of Napoleon."

"Often, very often; and if you will take his stories second-handed, you shall have them; though I had rather tell you of the orange groves that bloom along the silver Guadalquivir,

or sing to you the melodies by which the peasant-maiden is wooed and won in that soft clime,

> "Where dark-eyed girls to music twine
> The twisted tendrils of the vine."

"No, no. Let the tales be of war and danger now. You shall sing me the songs of love to-night. Beneath yon garish sun, music loses all its charms. When the stars come forth, and the moon imprints a chaste kiss upon the bending flowers of the Prairie, then, only then, shall you touch the guitar for me."

She yielded with a sweet smile; and the sun had sought his ocean-bed before their footsteps turned towards the Rancho.

In this way, day after day went by. The blind god was no longer hovering about the head of Inez. He had folded his wings upon her heart, and henceforth it was all his own. Mabry Gray was not in love; but the society of the bright and beautiful being by his side, had become very, very dear. It was a sweet dream, upon which he did not, and he could not, reason — a fresh, green oasis, where he was permitted to rest for a brief period on his dark and bloody journey through the world. He never thought of the added pangs its indulgence might bring. He never saw the abyss of guilt on whose verge he was standing. From the eyes of Inez, on the other hand, the veil of ignorance had been torn away. God has given to woman an instinct for her preservation — not always available, it is true, but always present to warn her when trembling to her fall. Again and again she tossed upon a sleepless pillow, in a vain effort to reason away the passion that consumed her.

"Why should I love him?" she murmured. "He cannot marry me; nor would I have him to do so. I would not that men should say he had taken to his bosom one who had first been the victim of Bartolo Piedras. I ought to tell him that there is a gulf between him and me, that may not be passed.

Yet how can I? He never speaks to me of love; and gentle and tender as his manner is, it is not that of a suitor. Why, oh, why, then, should I hug his image to my heart of hearts? Why should I cling to a passion no hope has ever come to illumine? I know not! I know not! I only know that it must have its course, and that the struggle to subdue it brings nothing but torture. After all, why may I not love him as I love the flowers? Why may I not worship him as I do the stars, afar off, without dreaming of a nearer approach? Yes, so shall it be. I will not seek to check the rising flame, but let it burn on the stronger and the brighter, because it looks for no reward."

Poor, deluded girl! Thousands upon thousands have reasoned thus before you, and thousands upon thousands have waked to find that the strongest of the children of earth is weaker than a babe, when the tempest of the passions is raging. "Lead us not into temptation," was the prayer of him to whom all the secrets of our fallible nature were revealed; and what temptation can be stronger than that which love holds out? Such a sentiment as you have pictured may have existed, and doubtless has existed, but it was when the parties were widely separated by distance, and no warm contact could turn the blood to fire. To be daily, and hourly associated with the object of an absorbing passion — to feel his arm encircle your waist, and his hand tremble in yours — to do this, and escape unscathed, is something no human will —no human virtue, has ever yet accomplished.

The return of Wilson put a stop for a time to the daily walks of Gray and Inez, and gave that infatuated girl another chance to reflect and deliberate. Did she avail herself of it? No. What woman, above all, what Spanish woman, ever did? She watched him at a distance — was sad and gloomy in his absence, and only brightened up when she heard the sound of his footsteps approaching. Solitude brought no wholesome

reflection — It was filled with images of him, and a low voice began to whisper in tones scarcely yet audible, that there were joys that might be hers. Let us turn from the gradual and necessary descent to guiltier thoughts. He or she who has listened to the first pleadings of the Tempter, will listen again; and if they do not fall, it will be from no strength of their own, but rather from some fortunate accident, or some providential interposition.

Wilson reported that he had arrived in the neighborhood of Caravajal's Hacienda without accident or adventure, and concealing himself in a chaparal thicket, for several days, made nightly inspections of the fortifications.

"I discovered," he said, "that there were two wall-pieces on the north side, and one on the west; — about the most useless weapon of which I have any knowledge. Taking advantage of the darkness, I crept close up to the palisades, and felt along the entire length of these two sides. There was not a single loophole cut in either. This puzzled me. On the other two sides they were cut at regular intervals, and it was easy to see that the defences were much the same as you have here. At daybreak every morning, I counted from my hiding-place the number of Peons who came out to attend to their various duties, and I concluded there could not be more than thirty fighting men, if so many. This seemed all the information I was likely to get. My provisions were reduced to a single strip of jerked beef. I dared not kill any of the cattle about me, for fear of attracting the attention of my *friends* in the Hacienda; nevertheless I resolved to wait one day longer, and make one more night inspection. The sun was about two hours high when I awoke from a deep sleep, and taking a survey of the country around, I observed a Mexican riding leisurely in the direction of the Rio Grande. This was an unhoped for piece of luck. Rapid riding would bring me to a point of the road where it is skirted by a deep

ravine, and completely hidden from the view of the Hacienda by clustering bushes. I barely gained the place in time to hide my horse, and take a stand behind a large cactus, before the Mexican rode up, singing a love-ditty with which he intended to regale the ears of some orange-cheeked damsel that night, and which he was practising beforehand, in order to be perfect in his part. A quick bound placed me at his side — one hand grasped his bridle — the other presented a pistol at his breast. The fellow was armed, but he was so terrified he never thought of his weapons. He rolled like a log from his horse to my feet, and begged for mercy. As soon as his fears would allow, I made him comprehend that I had no idea of taking his life *at that particular time.* His hands were soon tied behind him, and leading him up the ravine some distance from the road, I commenced a series of questions, to which I warned him it was very important he should make correct answers. From him, I learned that on the north and west sides of the robber's den, there was a double row of palisades about a foot apart, the intervening space being filled with dirt. This accounted for the absence of loop-holes. On one of these sides are the stables for the horses; and on the other, a shelter for the cattle. The roofs are nearly flat, some three feet lower than the palisades. Here, in case of an attack, the defenders of these two sides are posted. He said that Caravajal had returned from his late expedition, greatly chagrined and disheartened. The bravest of his immediate followers had been terribly cut to pieces, and his supply of ammunition was very short. The Peons who remained were for the most part unaccustomed to war, and could not be relied upon to resist a determined attack. This was all the fellow knew, and indeed all I cared to know; so I mounted my horse, and posted homewards as fast as he could carry me."

Gray listened attentively to the report of his scout, exhibiting no sign of approval or disapproval until its conclusion.

"I fear, Wilson, you have made a botch of this business — a thing I never knew you to do before. That fellow reported to his master, as soon as he could regain the Hacienda, the manner of his capture — the questions you had asked — and the answers he had given. Whatever may be said of Caravajal's courage, his shrewdness is unquestionable. By the time we get there, he will have a force of five times our number behind his wooden walls. You might as well have sent him formal notice, that on such a day and hour we would attack him."

The Borderer smiled. It was one of those dark, grim smiles, which are the omens of deeds that make boys and women grow pale when spoken of by the peaceful fireside on a winter's night.

"I thought of that, and determined to bring the fellow away with me — which I should have done, but when we reached the Rio Grande his horse did not take the water very kindly, and, somehow or other, he *fell* into the river. His hands were tied behind him, and he went down like lead. I am pretty sure he never rose."

"Ah! that alters the case. Let us to bed, for you must ride early to-morrow. We want five or six men to guard this Rancho in our absence. You know best who to get, and where to get them."

Three or four days before the appointed time for the rendezvous, the Rangers began to drop in — one, two, and three at a time. By noon of the last day, all had arrived — not a man had failed to keep his engagement. Once more they were seated in the long, low room of the *Rancho del tres niños*. A supper was smoking on the board, so substantial that in any other country it would have been named a dinner. Roast turkey, venison, and beef, were placed at regular intervals.

At either end was an immense earthenware bowl, filled with that peculiarly Mexican dish for which there is no English name. Venison, beef, fat bacon, potatoes, onions, and red pepper, stewed together, and swimming in a rich and nourishing gravy. Before each guest was a grass mat, on which a quantity of *tortillas* were placed — Coffee, very hot and very strong, made up a meal to which high health, and constant exercise in the open air, imparted a flavor no City proficient in the culinary art ever approached.

In the evening a cold Norther had commenced to blow — chilling man and beast alike with its icy breath. The building occupied by the Rangers was in a great degree protected from the wind by the intervening palisades. Two large wood fires added their genial warmth. Around these they gathered in groups as soon as the meal was concluded, to continue the various conversations the announcement of supper had interrupted.

"I trust in God," said one of them, walking to the door, and looking out on the clouds, "that this wind will die away before morning. I had rather fight ten Mexicans, any day, than be exposed to such a blast."

"Say *twenty*, Williams," replied another, "and I'll endorse the assertion. When I first came out here from the Green Mountains of Vermont, and heard the old settlers talking about the terrible effects of a Norther, I could hardly keep from laughing in their faces. I had been raised, for the most part, upon a snow-bank. For six months in the year, everything that had moisture in it was frozen stiff; and the idea of being chilled by a wind that would not form a scale on a mill-pond, appeared to me supremely ridiculous. Not long afterwards, I had occasion to ride from Richmond to Victoria. My friends assured me that all the signs indicated the speedy coming of a Norther, and urged a postponement of the journey. With all the presumption of ignorance, I replied that I had no fears

of a North wind — that, in fact, I had rather ride in it — preferring a little cold to the burning rays of the sun on the open plain. They still insisted I should remain, but to no purpose. I have observed, through life, that argument is always thrown away upon a fool; and a man superlatively ignorant of a given subject, who yet imagines that he is particularly well informed, is ten times worse than a fool. All that day the clouds wore the unmistakable appearance of a coming storm. Luckily for me, it did not burst until I was within fifteen miles of Victoria. I saw it afar off as it swept on, bending the prairie-grass before it in a long and regular line, thus marking its approach as distinctly as the crested foam that is rolled up before the tempest on the ocean. The first breath chilled me to the bone. I threw my blanket around me, but the fierce wind crept through every crevice in its folds, and I felt that I was rapidly congealing into ice. In the hope that the exercise of swift riding would relieve me from the numbing effects of the wind, my spurs were driven into my horse's flanks, and away we went, at a lick that would have done a Camanche good to witness. It did relieve the horse, though I kept getting colder and colder. The fingers of my left hand, which held the bridle, became so stiff and rigid that I could not unclose them; and when we dashed into Victoria, if my horse had not been endowed with sufficient sagacity to haul up on the lee side of a house, we must have gone right through the town and into the Guadalupe, for I had lost the power to rein him. It happened to be a grocery where we anchored. Some of the boys were within, driving away the tedium of confinement by drinking each other's health. They ran out and lifted me from my steed, but they had to bring a basin of hot water, and bathe my hand for some time before they could release the reins from the stiffened fingers. I was then carried in, *located* by the fire, and a glass of cold whiskey poured down my throat while they were making me a hot one. From that day to this

I have avoided a Norther as the devil would holy water. If this one continues until morning, I vote that we stay where we are until it is over."

"I have known one to last for a week," answered Gray; "and I should hate to be cooped up here so long. But there is no help for it. Neither man nor horse could live for twenty-four hours exposed to that withering blast. No choice is left us. We must stay, and might as well make up our minds to spend the time gaily."

Towards evening of the next day the wind abated, and by sunset it was entirely gone. The Rangers partook of a hearty meal, and started in high glee to pay their purposed visit to Caravajal. An election for Lieutenant had resulted in the choice of Burton, who, notwithstanding his youth, had on many occasions exhibited a courage that won for him the appellation of "Dare-devil Will."

For the first time on such an occasion, Mustang Gray cast many a lingering look behind. The society of Inez was beginning to be a necessity to him. He did not exactly love her—in all probability he never would—but he loved to sit by her side, to listen to her songs, and to drink in the low music of her voice. She alone possessed the power to move him from himself; and his glance continued to revert to the dwelling that contained her until the deepening shadows of the night shut it out from view. Then, and only then, he shook off the reluctance to leave her that oppressed him, and became once more the reckless leader of a reckless troop. The norther which had detained them during the day had done them good service in another respect. It had driven every roving Indian from the plains; thus insuring that their march would be unobserved by any prying eye, and unobstructed by any hostile demonstration. At the river, Gray communicated all the information he had received from Wilson, and entered into a minute detail of his plans. In that free troop, this was always

expected and demanded. Moreover, it was very essential to their efficiency. A battle once begun, few orders were issued or heeded. Each man generally fought "on his own hook." In order to direct their efforts to the attainment of a common object, it was therefore necessary to inform them of that object in advance. The plan of their leader, when made known, was invariably adhered to, though each soldier selected his own road for arriving at the common end.

Mustang Gray's plan was based upon the principle of bringing his whole force to bear on a single point. His object was to arrive at the Hacienda a little before midnight. A party of five men were to crawl up to the palisades, with axes, on the west side, where no loop-holes were cut. The remainder were to lie down in line on the plain, forty or fifty yards off. He anticipated Caravajal would keep poor watch. The Haciendas on the Rio Grande had enjoyed a long immunity. Except in the case of Bartolo Piedras, they had been unmolested by the Texans. The Indians who came prowling through the country were not strong enough to make any serious demonstration against these semi-fortresses. The robber bands of their own countrymen had even less inclination to run the hazard of an assault. So little danger was apprehended, that a sentinel at the gate was deemed all-sufficient, and he generally dozed away more than half his time. Apprised of this, Gray made his dispositions accordingly. He feared no discovery until the noise of the axes should rouse the slumbering sentinel. The riflemen were posted on the plain, to pick off the defenders as they mounted the house-tops, and thus protect the working party from annoyance. The execution of the plan was as perfect as its conception was judicious. The sound of the axes roused the human hive, who swarmed to the roof of the stables, as yet only half aware of the danger that threatened them. Stones and other missiles soon began to shower on the pioneers, but at the same moment the Texan rifles spoke, and

a wide space was cleared away along the ramparts. After the first volley, each Ranger marked his object, and fired to suit himself. Elevated above their foes, the forms of the Mexicans could be distinctly traced against the horizon, while the flashes of the Texan guns afforded the only guide to their own locality. Such a contest could not last. The lumbering wall-piece was only twice discharged before the roof was cleared of its defenders. And now a section of the outer palisades falls to the ground. The loose dirt is raked away, and the axes are busy with the inner line. At this conjuncture, Caravajal, who had observed that the Texans were all concentrated on one side, despairing of effectual resistance, mounted his horse, and, calling to his men to save themselves as best they could, fled from the place. Those of his retainers who were immediately around him galloped after. A Texan, whose position enabled him to see around the angle of the square, raised his rifle for a parting benediction, at the same time calling to his comrades that the enemy was flying from the gate. About a dozen of the Mexicans escaped. The remainder were met at the entrance by the Rangers, and shared the fate of the vanquished in all the murderous conflicts that marked the country and the period of which we write.

There are those, no doubt, who will find no palliation for many of the acts recorded in these pages. This is not to be wondered at. During the Mexican war, the uninformed and the unreflecting among our own officers and men, were too apt to indulge in severe and unmerited censure of the Rangers. They either never knew, or had forgotten the wrongs and outrages that had turned their blood to gall. They forgot that the first act of Ramirez Sezma, on the invasion of Texas, was to hoist a blood-red banner on the Church at Bexar, to indicate that no quarter would be given. They forgot the massacre of the Alamo. They forgot that Santa Anna had publicly proclaimed his intention to slaughter indiscriminately, and burn

without mercy. They forgot that when Fannin and Ward had subscribed articles of surrender, by which they were solemnly promised fair and honorable treatment, they and their men were butchered in cold blood, after they had been prisoners of war for many days, and after repeated assurances that they should be transported in safety to the United States. They forgot that, long after Mexico had given up all hope of reconquering the territory, she organized bands of merciless plunderers, who reduced murder and robbery to so perfect a system, that the whole country between the San Antonio and the Rio Grande was converted into a desert. In short, they forgot the provocation, and remembered only the retaliation. To be just, we must judge of actions in connection with the causes from which they flow. No wonder that a man whose house had been burned down, his property pillaged, and his fields laid waste, should seek to spoil the spoiler in his turn. No wonder that a man whose brother had been murdered, should long to smite the murderer. No wonder that a man whose wife had been violated, and then her body mangled with wounds, should be deaf to the cry of mercy when the ravisher is at his feet. To all this, and more, the Texans had been subjected. They felt it like men — like men they avenged it. He who would have done less, can claim little kindred with humanity.

The escape of Caravajal was a serious drawback to the triumph of Mustang Gray, and made it important that he should regain the northern bank of the Rio Grande as expeditiously as possible. His men were, therefore, immediately divided into three bodies. One was dispatched to bring up their own steeds —another was ordered to collect all the pack-horses and saddles within the Hacienda—while a third was employed in searching for the rich booty the Mexican had gathered through years of successful robbery. They were all experienced hands, and their separate tasks occupied but a brief period of time.

"Be off with the packs, Burton," said Gray: "Ride as fast

as you can, without distressing the horses. The *Head-Devil* has escaped, and will soon be upon our track, with men enough to give us trouble. I shall keep four men with me to scorch out the rats that have been fattening in this infernal hole. If I do not overtake you at the river, press on until I do."

In obedience to his orders, Burton moved off at a quick trot towards the Rio Grande. Gray and his four assistants again entered the Hacienda, and fired the building in many places. Waiting until the flames had acquired sufficient headway to render their extinction impossible, the adventurers galloped on the trail of their comrades. It was broad daylight, and the last of Burton's command were struggling up the opposite bank, when they arrived at the river. Dashing into the stream without pause or hesitation, they soon overtook the main body, when Mustang Gray himself assumed the lead, and directed Burton with ten men to keep a mile in the rear. Near noon, a halt was ordered in a cluster of trees that grew about a considerable water-hole, and the men were informed that they were allowed three hours for refreshment and repose.

A Ranger bivouac, in the primitive days of the corps, was a thing to which no other nation has ever furnished a parallel. Whenever a halt was ordered, the first business of every man was to strip his horse of its equipments, throw one end of a long *lariat* around his neck, fasten the other to a stake driven into the ground, and leave the animal to graze at will within the circle to which the *lariat* extended. No time was lost in building fires, or other preparations for cookery. A strip of dried beef, the size of a man's hand, was taken from the wallet that always hung at the saddle-bow, and cut with a bowie-knife, a mouthful at a time. Bread was a luxury never dreamed of on the plains. A draught from his water-gourd washed down the hard, dry food; when the soldier, making a pillow of his saddle, stretched himself upon the grass, and slept as contentedly as if he had dined at the table of a king, and reposed

on the softest couch that luxury ever invented. These soldiers have departed with the necessity that called them into existence, and it is doubtful if the world will ever look upon their like again. Now and then an old stager may be found, scattered here and there over the country where he once roamed in unbridled freedom; but his occupation is gone, and the daring rover has sunk into the herdsman of cattle and sheep, upon the very lands where his battles were fought, and his shouts of triumph echoed to the skies.

At the appointed time Gray roused the men to continue their hurried march. On the third day, when in sight of the Nueces, a man rode up from the rear-guard to inform him that a strong body of Mexicans were in close pursuit. The intelligence produced neither haste nor confusion. A portion of the best mounted of the company were detailed to remain with him — the others were put under the command of Wilson, who was ordered to take charge of the pack-horses and push forwards.

"Burton's men," he said, "when added to these I have, will make seventeen in all. It will go hard with us if we can not delay their march long enough for you to reach the Mission in safety. Beyond that I do not think they will venture; even if they succeed in defeating us here — an event upon which it is scarcely worth while to speculate."

Burton soon after appeared in sight, riding leisurely enough — himself the rearmost of the troop. Occasionally he cast backward glances upon the advancing foemen, like the Lion who stalks reluctantly away from the Hunters, yet pauses repeatedly, and looks back with a fierce growl, as if doubting whether or not to turn and rend his pursuers His men were joined to those of Gray, and the whole rode at a slightly accelerated pace for the Nueces. The river was nearly dry — the water only standing in pools where the bed of the stream was below the usual level. A short distance above the cross-

ing-place, there was a little hillock through which the waters had cut a deep channel — here the high banks afforded an excellent shelter for the horses, as well as an impregnable breast-work for the men. The Mexicans who were near enough to observe the movement up the stream, but who had been prevented by the trees and bushes from ascertaining the exact position taken up by Gray, halted at the distance of three hundred yards to reconnoitre. This was a work both of difficulty and danger. The first one that approached within rifle-shot was tumbled to the ground by a bullet through his breast. A warning so impressive was not unheeded, and fully an hour was lost by the foe in peering through the bushes at too great a distance to acquire any useful information. At length they returned to their commander no wiser than before. Putting his troops in motion, he crossed the river above, and formed in line on the Prairie in front of the Rangers, his left resting on the San Antonio road. Soon afterwards a man bearing a white flag was observed approaching the river. The object was so transparent, that Gray hesitated whether or not to shoot him in his tracks. As it was, he advanced to the outskirts of the timber, and halted him so far off that his mission was fruitless. In reply to the stern inquiries of the American, he answered,

"I am commissioned by Col. Caravajal to say, that if you are a brave man you will come out from your covert and fight him fairly."

"Ah! I thought you were the bearer of some such important message. Go back and tell your Colonel that if any fighting is done to-day, he will have to come here to do it; unless he will meet me single-handed half-way between our troops. Tell him too to send no more messengers here, for I shall shoot the next one that comes if he carries forty flags of truce."

The disappointed messenger retraced his steps, and Gray

ordered one of his own men to climb a tree and watch the movements of the enemy.

"What are they doing now, Wells?" he inquired when the man had perched himself among the topmost boughs.

"They are setting fire to the dry grass in front, and will soon smoke us out."

"Not exactly. The grass will not burn far into the timber, and if it should, we are safe enough under this bank. They must try something else."

By this time a bright sheet of flame spread along the Prairie. It rose higher and higher, roaring angrily as it rolled in the direction of the bank where the Rangers had taken refuge. Now it enters the wood — a dead tree to which the dry leaves still clung catches the flames, and a pyramid of fire shoots upwards to the skies.

The wind was blowing, but not steadily. It came in fitful puffs, with frequent changes of direction. A strong current carried the flames from the burning tree directly into the branches where Wells was perched, who began to descend without waiting for his Captain's permission.

"Back!" shouted Gray, bringing his double-barrelled gun to his shoulder as he spoke. "Back, Sir, or I'll save you the trouble of *crawling* down."

"Don't you see, Captain, the fire is scorching me?"

"Don't *you* see the sight I've got on you? and don't you know there is more danger in my gun than in a handful of burning leaves? Back to your look-out!"

Obedience was the only alternative, and Wells climbed back to his post. The light materials which fed the flames were exhausted, and another change of wind relieved him from the effects of the smoke.

"What are they doing now?"

"Strong parties are filing from either flank towards the river, above and below us."

"That will do. Down quick. Mount, men, and follow!"

Swift and crushing as the fall of an avalanche, they burst on the weakened centre, each one firing his deadly revolver as they neared the foe. The line of the Mexicans was not merely broken — it was destroyed. The triumphant Rangers swept over it, their exuberant spirits finding vent in the exulting notes of a stirring song, that floated far behind them as they rode:

"The Ranger's at home on his Prairie again."

A few miles satisfied them that no pursuit was intended. The truth was, Caravajal discovered that he had wasted several hours of valuable time upon what he now believed to be only the rear-guard of the Texans. The charge of the Rangers had revealed to him that the pack-horses, which he supposed were hidden under the bank of the river, were journeying on to the San Antonio, and were now in all probability beyond the reach of pursuit from his own jaded men and horses. Besides, the same men who had just swept through his lines were still between him and the booty it was his object to recapture, and if pressed upon too closely, would infallibly turn again; thus causing another delay, and insuring the retreat of their comrades beyond peradventure. Baffled and enraged, he turned homewards, muttering many a vow of future vengeance.

The Rangers, anticipating no further trouble, were riding gaily over the Prairie. Burton was by the side of Wells, whom he addressed in the grave tones of an officer upon whom an unpleasant duty has devolved.

"Do you know, Wells, that I shall have to ask for a Court-martial on you as soon as we get to Mustang's Ranch?"

"What for?" demanded the Ranger.

"I saw you shoot at a Mexican in less than ten steps, and miss him clear. Now, that has been a finable offence ever since I set foot in Texas."

"And, by God! if I did, there never was a man who had a better excuse. My eyebrows and eyelashes were both singed clean off; and how the devil was a fellow to shoot with any certainty — at least until he had practised a while without them?"

The reply of Burton was stopped on his lips by a yell that came faintly over the Prairie. Before a single comment could be made, the voice of Mustang Gray was heard, shouting loud and clear,

"Forward, men! Ride as if your lives depended on your horses' heels. That was a Camanche war-cry, and Wilson is in trouble."

Wilson had obeyed the injunctions of his Captain to the letter. Skilled in every art of the border, he drove the pack-horses onward just as far as their strength would permit. For twenty miles everything went well, and he was beginning to congratulate himself that the goods under his charge were safe. Still, the cautious Scout relaxed none of his vigilance. Some dark spots on the Prairie, miles ahead, attracted his attention. As he drew nearer, he fancied he could distinguish the outlines of men and horses. To make assurance doubly sure, he applied a small spy-glass to his eye.

"They are Camanches, d—n them!" he muttered, closing his glass, "and at least fifty of them, at that."

A half-mile in front, and to the left, there was a little timber-mott, not exceeding a hundred yards in circumference. To this point the experienced frontier-man directed the train. The bridles of the pack-horses were knotted together—a raw-hide *lariat* passed from bit to bit, and the whole securely fastened to a tree, to prevent the possibility of a *stampede*. The men were formed in a semicircle outside of the horses, and in this position they awaited the attack of the Savages.

The two parties had discovered each other about the same time, though the Indians, unaided by spy-glasses, were longer

in determining the number and character of their opponents. The advance movement of Wilson led them to believe that he intended to attack them; and it was not until he filed into the timber-mott that they were undeceived. Even then they did not put their horses into a gallop; but came on at a trot until within two hundred yards, when they formed in line, and charged up near enough to send a volley of arrows into the timber. Wilson had previously passed from man to man, to caution and instruct them. Long experience had taught him that the main effort of the savages would be to *stampede* his horses, and scatter them over the Prairie, where they could be caught at leisure. For fear the precautions he had already taken might not prove sufficient, he charged the men particularly to fire only one at a time; each one waiting until his left-hand man had commenced re-loading before delivering his own shot.

The first volley of the Indians was answered by a single shot, which struck a horse in the forehead, and buried itself in the brain. His sudden fall, when nearly at full speed, threw his rider far over his head. Stunned and bruised, it was a full minute before he regained his feet, and attempted to fly. A leaden messenger, dispatched from the rifle of another Ranger, overtook him, and stopped his flight forever. A yell of rage went up from the Indian line, and again they charged — this time apparently determined to force a way into the wood at every hazard. A single rifle-shot greeted them as before, and another warrior fell lifeless to the plain. Taught by the experience of two attempts, that the effort to enter the timber in front, if successful at all, must be attended by a heavy loss, the Camanches divided into two bodies, one of which began to make the circuit of the timber, to charge from the rear.

They had been too much occupied to observe the approach of Mustang Gray, who was now in full sight. A loud shout, intended to warn Wilson that succor was at hand, apprised

them of his presence. Exhibiting a cool intrepidity worthy of veteran soldiers, they reunited their divided bands, and faced this unexpected foe.

"Rein up," shouted Gray. "The red devils show fight. Walk your horses, and let them blow a little, before the tug comes on."

Silently and slowly the two bands approached each other.

"Don't you think, Captain," asked Burton, whose impatient spirit chafed at seeing an enemy in his front, "don't you think we are near enough for a rush?"

"Not yet. Wait until our rifles will be certain to tell. When we charge, the pistol alone must be used."

The Camanches were the first to charge. The Rangers halted—poured in a deadly fire from their standing position—planted their spurs in their coursers' sides, and in an instant were mingled in a hand-to-hand encounter. The warriors of the desert, gallant as they were, withered away before the superior strength, and superior arms of the white man. Still they rallied, reformed, and fought on. Notwithstanding the havoc made in their ranks, they yet outnumbered their opponents; and the battle was far from being decided, when Wilson came thundering upon their flank. This fresh and desperate onset scattered the now-disheartened Savages, and the survivors fled in wild terror over the plain. The loss of the Rangers was small—only one man was killed. Among the wounded was Mustang Gray, who had an arrow through his left arm; and the gallant steed, who had borne him so long, was reeling and shivering from the effects of two wounds, one in the neck, and one in the flank. Slowly, as if lying down to sleep, he knelt upon the grass, turned on his side; cast a long, lingering look at his master, and closed his eyes in death.

"He is gone," said Gray, seating himself by the side of the fallen steed, and caressing his senseless head. "He is gone, and I shall never look upon his like again."

The Rangers, sympathising with a grief that all of them understood, and all of them would have felt under similar circumstances, left him to indulge it unrestrained. Burton was the first to approach and remind him that he had an arrow in his arm.

"Ah! yes. I had forgotten it. Cut off the feather, Burton, and pull it through. Take Williams' sash, and bandage it, to stop the bleeding. Poor fellow! he would have given it to me cheerfully while living, for such a purpose, and will not begrudge it, now that he is dead. Tell some of the Boys to catch a loose horse, and tie him on it. We must not leave him here to be mangled by the wolves. By the Lord above us, Burton," he continued in a fiercer tone, "there shall be wailing among Camanche squaws, and ashes where Camanche lodges now stand, to pay for this day's work."

"I shall be with you, heart and hand," replied the Lieutenant, fastening the last knot of the bandage.

Shaking the unwonted depression from his spirits, Gray rose from beside the body of his dead steed, and issued the necessary orders for resuming the march. The next day, they rode into the Rancho of Josefa, and, amid the wild revelry of the night, forgot all the dangers, and all the hardships they had endured and overcome.

CHAPTER XV.

"The Sun goes down with sudden gleam,
And beautiful as a lovely dream;
And silently as air
The vision of a dark-eyed girl,
With long and raven hair,
Glides in as guardian spirits glide;
And lo! is kneeling by his side."

MUSTANG GRAY was again left with none but the usual inmates of the Rancho. Under that head, however, Wilson, Smith, and Wells must be included. They had long considered themselves, and were considered by Gray, a part of the household. Their services were very valuable in many respects besides the defence of the place. On their part, they were perfectly contented with a situation that afforded them frequent opportunities of engaging in exciting adventures, and, in the intervals, that other desideratum of South-Western life —"a good place for a man to hang up his hat."

By one of the departing Rangers, Gray had dispatched the following letter to John Allison:

"I am laid up, John, for awhile. How long I can't tell. Mother Josefa, who is the best doctor of my acquaintance, says that it will be three weeks, and it may be five, before my left arm will be of any service to its owner. What I am to do in the interim, I'll be cursed if I know. She has laid an embargo on "Sperits," and for fear I might break through the law, has taken possession of the keys of the store-room, and swears by all the Saints in the Catholic calender (that is,

some forty thousand) that not a drop of any thing stronger than coffee shall go down my throat, until she thinks all danger of inflammation and fever at an end. This is bad enough to a man of my habits, but the worst is to be told. I have lost Saxon. The only comforting reflection is, that he died like a warrior, on a field of victory, with his battle harness on. It is not worth while to encumber this letter by repeating the story. Burton, or some of the boys, will tell you. While I am mewed up here, you must look out for a horse to supply his place. He must be a *good one.* I have plenty of cattle here, such as they are, but I want an animal that a man can bet his life upon, and feel no fear of losing the stake. Let him be full sixteen hands high — Pure American blood. No Mexican cross. Short back, deep in the chest, sharp shoulders, wide between the eyes, limbs short in the fore-knee, flat and broad in the fore-arm, and well tucked under him—Small pointed ears, well muscled, but not too heavily. Your *quarter race* stock will not begin to do for such chases as I frequently take. Add to these a nostril that you can run your fist into, and you have an animal that will suit me, and for which you may pay any price. You will have to look among the new comers from the States, for no old Texan will part with such a horse while he can beg, borrow, or steal enough to keep body and soul together. I can not get about to attend to it myself, and I trust it to you to have me mounted, by the time my arm is fit for service. I have promised to pay an early visit to the Camanches, and give them a lesson upon the danger of interfering with

MUSTANG GRAY."

The wound Gray had received, was more serious than he chose to acknowledge. The arrow had grazed the bone, and the broad head had torn the muscles terribly. Instead of three weeks, or five, which he had fixed as the date of his recovery, it was eight before he could remove his arm from the

sling in which it was carried. In the meantime, he was planting the seeds of new sorrows, and preparing a harvest of new regrets. Wounds and sickness naturally incline the heart to softer feelings. They furnish, also, an opportunity, and an excuse, for the exhibition of a tender friendship very harmless between persons of the same sex — very dangerous when a young man, and a young woman are subjected to its influence. A great Poet has said, that "flesh is formed of fiery dust." Mabry Gray and Inez Montero were no exceptions to the rule. To the pain of his wound, was added a few days after his return, a raging fever, brought on by his own reckless imprudence. Day by day she sat by his bedside. Hour by hour she held the cooling draught to his burning lips, or smoothed back the matted hair from his brow; and when the fever left him, weak and fretful as a spoiled child, she chased away the shadows of discontent with the sweet songs of her ancestral home. As soon as his strength permitted, their walks were resumed. Again their forms were mirrored in the silver waters of the San Antonio, and their voices floated on the still air low and tender as the murmur of its waves.

"You are sadder than usual," one day she said, "and I would fain know what sorrow has stung you."

"None, Inez, none. But wounds and sickness are no great sweeteners of the temper. I have been very exacting I know, and I fear I have not been as thankful as I ought to have been for all your kindness."

"It is not that," she answered quickly. "It is not that. The natural fretfulness of a sick couch has passed away, and a settled gloom has come to take its place. Some bird of evil omen has fanned your soul with its sombre wing."

She turned her eyes full upon him as she spoke,

> "But his were silent — his appeared to stray,
> In far forgetfulness, away, away."

At length he recalled his wandering thoughts, and said,

"Come, Inez, let us take a seat on yonder mossy bank. It is not very long since I sat on the greensward in a lonely *Mott*, and listened to a dark tale of your telling. I too have a story to tell. A story of love, fierce enough for the deadliest hate — of a love whose maddening power drove me forth in the morning of my days, a blood-stained and desperate man — reckless of existence here — almost without a hope of mercy hereafter. No human ear has ever heard the tale. Locked in my own bosom, the secret has festered and rankled there. More than once I have resolved to tell you all, but resolutions reluctantly formed are easily shaken, and sometimes one light cause, sometimes another, has driven back the words that trembled on my tongue. Years ago, when the down was just beginning to spring upon my cheek, a sad bereavement caused me to become the inmate of a family whose earnest sympathy did much to dry up the first tears I had ever shed. In that family was a young girl about my own age, from whom I had hitherto shrunk with the sensitive shyness of an awkward boy. Gradually the feeling of restraint in her presence grew less. I have heard that love often leaps into being, like Minerva from the head of Jove, full-grown and fully armed. It was not so with me. Slowly, step by step the fiery passion made its approach. So insensibly did it steal upon me, that long before I knew it myself my very soul had passed from my keeping. I watched her as the doomed captive through his iron grates watches the stars the last night they will ever shine upon him. When she left the room, the only light it contained for me was removed. When she sought her own chamber, my eye followed her until the closing door shut out the rapturous vision; and when her father assembled us, as was his daily custom, for prayer, my chair was always so placed that I could take in the outlines of her form from underneath the hand on which my head was leaned. Quickly to her, much more quickly than to me, came the knowledge that she was

worshipped. The open frankness of her manner underwent a change. She no longer came near me when it could be avoided, and when we were thrown together alone, as sometimes happened, she exhibited an evident impatience to be gone. Her altered manner brought about a self-examination that revealed the abject slavery to which I was reduced. Almost simultaneously grew up the conviction that here it was next to madness to adore. If I had been of a nature to abandon any pursuit on account of the dangers that environed it, it was now too late. The struggle to tear her from my heart would have been useless, and I knew it. I loved on, though I dared not whisper the word in the ear of her who had become my destiny. This was a state of torture that could not long be endured. I resolved to go out in the world, and hope whispered that if I returned with fortune and a good name, she might be mine. It was necessary to communicate my purpose and its motives. In the interview that followed, I asked for no return — I claimed nothing but the privilege to hope that, hereafter, when years had proven my faith, and the trials of the world had left me unspotted and pure, I might come back and plead a cause I knew it would be idle to press before. Even this was denied. Terrible as the blow was, it did not crush me. Hope has been named a star by the poets of every age, and the simile is so just as to command universal assent. In the broad light of day the lesser luminary fades away, or rather is swallowed up by the greater effulgence around us. When the sun seeks his place of repose, and night asserts her dominion over the earth, the star glitters in the diadem of the sombre queen, and we turn with a fonder gaze from the blackness below to the brightness above. The angry king of the storms may gather his host of clouds and shut it out from our vision, but we mark the spot where it last shone, and watch for the first glimmering ray that tells of its reappearance. So in the midst of prosperity

when not a wish is unfilled, and not a desire is ungratified, hope disappears from a firmament where it has no office to perform. When misfortune banishes prosperity, and darkness settles upon the soul, the fires of hope are kindled, and the anguish of to-day is lightened by the promised gladness of to-morrow. Despair may struggle to hang its gloomy veil between us and the altar's flame, but the obscurity will be rendered endurable by the lingering belief that like the storm cloud it will disappear and leave that pilot-fire to guide us to a happier bourne. Hope is God's boon to the wretched, and it never dies until his protecting hand is withdrawn. I was not yet wholly lost. *I hoped.*

"In the business of the world, application and energy are the masters of success. I had both, and was beginning to climb the hill of life with every flattering prospect before me, when I heard that a stranger had won the priceless jewel for whose possession I would have thrown a world away. I had been kind, and gentle, and good. Up to that time, I could not have crushed a worm without a feeling of regret. In one day — nay, in one hour — my whole nature was changed. Canting hypocrites, who traffic upon righteousness, yet are ever unmindful of the divine command, "judge not, that ye be not judged," will say that the evil was always there, and only wanted an excuse for its development. I shall not stop to comment upon the charity of their judgment, or interrupt a chain of facts to speculate upon a theory. It is enough that from that day I became a thing to be feared by those who value life extravagantly. Almost without an object, I returned to the home of my childhood. I had no well-defined purpose beyond that of seeing the man who had rifled the honey-dew of my existence. The instinct of hate led me to believe him a villain — eventually I proved him to be so. After that we met, one moonlight night, on a lonely road, with a single witness, and the next day there was work for the village sexton.

It was not until the deed was done, that all its fearful consequences stood out before me. I have borne them—I can bear them yet.

"A fugitive from justice, weary days were passed, and weary miles were wandered over, until Satan threw Bartolo Piedras in my way, and I became an inmate of his Rancho. Action and excitement cast their strong spells upon a withered heart, and tied me to his service until the Texan revolution offered a nobler field. Soon after the treaty with Santa Anna had been signed, I braved the law's vengeance, the scaffold, and a felon's doom, to urge, for the last time, a scorned and rejected suit. Again I was spurned. Again, in the darkness of the night, I left the land of my nativity, to plant and to gather thorns in this region of discord and of blood. Hitherto no serious sickness had depressed, no serious wound had enfeebled me. The dangers of the border were braved with an impunity bordering on the miraculous. But while stretched upon yonder couch, strange thoughts have thronged around me. If, instead of being torn and mangled as it was, this strong arm had been shattered so that amputation was necessary, what a night of horrors would have been before me! Death is nothing; for that terminates all on this side of the dim hereafter. But any one of a thousand accidents may reduce me to a helpless cripple; and then, with no refuge from my own thoughts, to what alternative, save madness, can I look? for I love that woman as fervently now as in the days of my boyhood, and I feel that from the future, as from the past, rest and forgetfulness are banished forever. Do you wonder, Inez, that I am sad, after such thoughts have been my visitors?"

Who can tell the feelings that agitated the bosom of his fair listener, while the dark story of his life was thus concisely related? Sometimes one passion asserted a supremacy, and sometimes another. Now she was bathed in tears, and now, again, a deep flush imparted its crimson hue to cheek and

bosom. Through all her varied thoughts, however, there ran a sad and bitter impression that she had been building castles in the empty air. The heart she hoped to win — that she believed she had touched — was laid bare, and she found it already wasted by fires that are never rekindled. Men may love twice, and very often they do. The calm mixture of esteem and liking, which is the best guaranty of domestic felicity, may be felt a dozen times or more. But there is a degree of passion never attained more than once. If unsuccessful, its victim is blasted like the hemlock which the lightning has traversed from its topmost bough to its root. If successful, there are tears and death even in its ecstasy. There is a story of the olden time, that a little stream, looking up to the sun through the trees that shaded its bed, became enamoured of the fiery god, and wooed him to its embraces. In the presence of the rays for whose coming it had panted, the stream shrunk away — the fountain was dried up — and a rocky channel, bare and desolate, was all that remained. So it is with a passion such as filled the heart of Mabry Gray. To win, or to lose, is death.

Inez did not reason — she *felt* that flowers were as apt to spring on a volcano's brink, as for a new love to bloom in a bosom scorched and scared like his. To his concluding question she returned no answer; but, rising to her feet, walked back to the Rancho in silence. That night she did not appear at the supper-table; and the next morning, traces of care and watchfulness were visible in every line of her lovely features. Gray sought her as usual when the rays of the declining sun were growing weak, and the cool breeze stirred the grass and flowers of the Prairie. A hundred times in the past twenty-four hours she had resolved to walk with him no more — a hundred times she had determined to conquer the passion he had inspired. Alas! what are human resolutions when opposed to human desires? She did go; and such are the changes, such the uncertainties of an hour, that she returned

with a lighter heart and a lighter step. Their conference had lasted until the stars were shining over them; and whatever was its subject, it ended by his clasping her for the first time in a warm embrace. What is there that so thrills the frame in that meeting of the lips between youth and beauty? What is there in that simple act that makes the brain swim, the heart throb, and the veins tingle with mingled rapture and delirium? How is it that soul, and sense, and being, are concentrated into one burning moment, in whose wild intoxication the past and the future are alike forgotten — the heaven above us, and the hell beneath, alike unheeded?

"You will love me now," she said, while a soft light beamed from her dark eyes that would have made the Prophet Elijah pause before he mounted the fiery chariot that was to bear him to the realms of eternal joy. "You will love me — or at least you will let me love you — cling to you in health — nurse you and soothe you in sickness and in sorrow."

"For worlds on worlds I would not love again, Inez, as I have loved; but I like you more than any living thing, and that is better than love for you and for me. In your sweet society I have learned to forget much that is gone, and to pant much less eagerly for the dangerous fray, or the maddening revel. Still, you must not deceive yourself with the hope of driving off the Evil Spirit altogether. There will be times — frequent times, when your spells will be powerless, and the demon will direct me as he lists."

From that day they sought the deep wood more frequently than before, and lingered longer within its leafy screen. Often, very often, their arms were twined around each other, and their lips almost grew together. As yet, their intercourse was sinless. Would it remain so? Search the annals of the world from creation's earliest morn to the present hour, and when you have found one human being who has passed unspotted through such an ordeal, answer the inquiry.

The hue of health had returned to the cheek of Mabry Gray, and with its quickened pulses came the remembrance of his compact with Burton, to invade the country of the Camanches. Wilson, who had been on a visit to San Felipe, brought back a brief letter from John Allison:

"I send you, Mabry, a better horse than you described, though I would not ride him two days for his weight in gold. He will kick, bite, strike with his forefoot, and is, altogether, the most unmanageable brute I have ever seen. Burton insists that he was made for you, or you for him, he does not know exactly which. As I am half-way of the same opinion, I send him along."

Approaching the stable, Gray was met by Diego running out, while his ears were saluted by a noise not unlike that which might be produced by the fly-wheel of a Mississippi steamboat getting off its centre, and knocking for an entrance through the cabin-floor.

"That horse is the very devil, Señor," exclaimed the panting Mexican.

"Well, he will have a happy time of it in proving himself a greater devil than I am. Bring my saddle, and a Mexican bridle."

It was a work of no little difficulty to get the bit between the teeth of the vicious animal, and it cost a still longer struggle to fasten the saddle securely on his back. This accomplished, Gray threw the rein over his neck, and, turning his head towards the gate, sprung upon him. At first, he squatted almost to the ground — then bounded madly forward. He reared, shyed, plunged, and kicked in vain. At each unsuccessful effort, the long spurs were driven into his flank, until, furious with pain, he dashed at full speed across the open Prairie. In less than a week, he was completely subdued — would come at his master's call, and follow him like a dog around the enclosure. But he would obey no one else, and none other could

approach him safely. During the Mexican war, the Infantry officers, in the intervals of active operations, would frequently borrow the horses of their mounted acquaintances for such pleasure excursions as the service allowed. It was well known that Gray never refused an application of the kind, but very few were willing to risk their necks upon "Sorrel," and *they* never applied a second time.

A year or two more rolled away, and the name of Mustang Gray had become as great a terror to the Indians and Mexicans along the western line of Texas as was that of the Black Douglas to the English Borderers. Scarcely a month went by without its chronicle of some desperate fray, or some hair-breadth escape. In revenge for the proclamation of outlawry, he issued a counter-proclamation, in which he announced his purpose to hang every Mexican who appeared in Texas under a "permit" from Sam Houston, who was now a second time President. Nor was this a mere idle threat. It was executed to the letter. The safe-conduct of the President was thus converted into a death-warrant, and very soon all applications for such dangerous documents ceased.

In the meantime, great events were beginning to appear on the canvass of the future. Texas had waded through a bloody trial to independence, but not to peace. The government of Mexico persistently refused to acknowledge the separate existence of her revolted province; and for nine years a ferocious war raged on the confines of the two countries. The Texans who fell into their hands, were either shot immediately, or compelled to labor in chain-gangs on the public works. The constant incursions of marauding bands made settlements for agricultural purposes impossible to the westward of the Guadalupe, and the whole of that desirable country was a desert. Her growth thus checked — her population restricted — her resources incapable of development — harassed by an interminable war, petty in its immediate results, overwhelming in the

immense debt it was daily accumulating, Texas turned her eyes to the mother country for relief. The election of James K. Polk as President of the United States, settled the question of annexation; and on the first of March, 1845, Congress passed the joint resolution by which Texas became an integral part of the American Union. In the month of August of the same year, General Taylor encamped an army of four thousand men at Corpus Christi. Here, before the declaration of war, he was joined by Mustang Gray and his Rangers. The campaign of 1846, which added so bright a lustre to the name of Zachary Taylor, is too familiar to the American reader to be dwelt on here. Throughout all the operations of that memorable year, Mustang Gray was an actor of no mean distinction. As Captain of a company familiar with the country — habituated to hardship, and careless of odds or danger, his services were often put in requisition, and his duties always discharged with unsurpassed zeal and energy. He was now in his proper element. The more dangerous the service, the better it suited his own temper, and the temper of his men. But his old hatred of the Mexicans clung to him, and sometimes led him to the commission of acts little in accordance with the merciful disposition of his Commander. He could not learn to forget the bloody feuds of years. The broken treaties, the treacheries, the house-burnings, and the massacres, with which he was familiar, still haunted his memory; and he could not realize the altered circumstances that gave to the war a more humane, and less revolting, character They were his old enemies. For eleven years he had never known them to exhibit a touch of mercy; and the long habit of retaliation was too firmly fixed to be easily shaken off. Not long after the battle of Buena Vista, he was ordered to escort a number of prisoners from Monterey to Camargo. The prisoners never reached their destination. It was reported that they had *escaped*. The "Mustangers" (as Gray's company were called) had

established a reputation that threw many doubts on the truth of the story. The General himself utterly disbelieved it; but, finding, after diligent inquiry, no proof to the contrary, he was compelled to accept it as true. However, he resolved to trust them with no more prisoners; and soon afterwards ordered them to Camargo, to reinforce the garrison at that place.

About this time, it was understood in the army that the War Department at Washington had determined upon a double invasion. General Scott was to move from Vera Cruz along the National Road upon the capital of Mexico, while General Taylor directed his columns to the same point from Saltillo, by San Luis Potosi. New regiments were constantly arriving upon the Rio Grande. To render them as effective as possible, a camp of discipline and instruction was established near Mier, twenty-five miles from Camargo. The town of Mier is celebrated for the number and beauty of its women. Almost every night it was enlivened by *fandangos*, where chivalry paid its universal homage to the gentler sex, and where the loveliest of the mingled blood of the Spaniard and the Aztec learned to forget, in the voluptuous contact of the mazy dance, that the strong arms which held them, and the pleading tones which charmed their willing ears, belonged to their country's foes. Sometimes the dance was in crowded halls — more frequently in the open air, in some garden, where a large circle was formed, surrounded by posts at regular intervals, to which were suspended lamps of various shapes and colors, blue, yellow, green, carnation, crimson, white—all that the painter's catalogue could supply — and over the whole the amorous moon poured its love-inspiring beams. But whether in garden or in hall— in the deep shadow of tropical trees and shrubs, or under the flashing light of a hundred lamps, American uniforms glittered by the side of the fairest and sweetest, and American vows were blushingly welcomed, despite the Saxon's harsh pronunciation of the soft language of Castile.

Alas! how many of the gallant spirits who mingled in those joyous scenes, are now no more! Of the senior officers, General Hoppin, Colonels Belknap, Temple, Echols, and Tibbats are gone — cut off in the full flush of manly strength, and the full tide of patriotic usefulness. But two remain, Colonel Hays, of the Rangers, and Colonel Gorman, of the Indiana Volunteers. Among their juniors, the mortality has been proportionably great. Disease and the sword cut a wide pathway through their ranks. Is there one of their surviving comrades who will not pause to drop a tear over the graves of as noble and true-hearted a band as ever drew the sword in their country's cause?

Mustang Gray was stationed at Camargo. Often, after the sun went down, he would mount his horse, and, before ten o'clock, his active figure would be the most conspicuous among the dancers at Mier. One, two, three o'clock—as long as the most determined devotees of pleasure would remain, they were sure of the Ranger's company. The same morning, he would be back at his post. It was no uncommon achievement for him to ride fifty miles, and dance five hours, between sun and sun. Seemingly among the gayest of those who thronged the festive scene, no one, unacquainted with his history, could have believed that a shadow had ever rested upon his soul. The smiling features and the ringing laugh betrayed no sign of the agony he had endured. The cheerful voice, the ready jest, and the pleasant story, spread an impenetrable veil over ruined hopes and blasted aspirations. His sorrows were his own. He sought no sympathy — told no tales of wretchedness — uttered no complaints. Inez alone had dragged the secret from him, and Inez guarded it as carefully as himself. Thus, to the tortures of memory was added the scarcely more endurable burden of ceaseless anxiety to hide what his proud and sensitive spirit could not brook to reveal. Who can blame him if he sought forgetfulness everywhere — delirium at the gaming-

table, and in the bowl? At least, before we anticipate the fiat of his Maker, and pass sentence upon his misdeeds, let us turn to the 13th chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians, and impress upon our memories the estimation in which Charity was held by the great Apostle.

The period for which Gray had entered the service was about to expire, and the Department having by this time determined to suspend operations on the line of the Rio Grande, no new volunteers could be received. About the same time, the camp of instruction at Mier was broken up. The 16th Infantry was ordered to Monterey; the 10th, to Matamoras; the 13th, the Rangers, and the Indiana volunteers, to Vera Cruz, to reinforce General Scott, then occupying Puebla, and preparing to descend into the Valley of Mexico.

Unfit for peace—incapable of inaction while a battle was yet to be fought, Mustang Gray determined to unite himself as a private volunteer to some company bound for the seat of war. With this object in view, he descended to Matamoras, there to await an opportunity of carrying it into effect. In that city of dogs, mud, vermin, grease, and "all uncleanness," the terrible vomito was raging. In reckless disregard of the pestilence, Gray exposed himself alike to the burning sun at noonday and the poisonous malaria at night. For weeks his iron constitution withstood the fearful trial. At length the bolt fell, and stretched him on a fevered bed, while the eldest of the Fates, the dreaded Atropos, sat by, in her garments of black, ready to cut the thread of his troubled and chequered existence. Rough but kind nurses were around his couch. All that medical science could do was tried. On the third day his mind wandered, and then the pent-up feelings of years broke forth. He lived over again the days of his youth. Again he reclined beneath the tall pines, and murmured his tale of love to the voiceless stars. Once more he stood by the Cape Fear, pleading for the privilege to hope that at some

distant day kinder words and brighter smiles would welcome his suit. Now the fires of jealousy were raging in his bosom, and the bloody revenge occupied his thoughts. The midnight flight—the weary journey—the long, long night of agony and crime that followed. All that the rack could never have wrung from his quivering frame, was revealed in his delirium, to astonished hearers, who now, for the first time, found a clue to the dark labyrinth of his life.

In anticipation of death in the coming campaign, he had sent for John Allison, in order to settle the property his wasteful habits had left him, upon Inez Montero. His early friend, accompanied by Inez, arrived while the delirium was at its height. At once the lovely woman took the place of the rude soldiers who had hitherto watched by the side of their former leader. For two days she would take no sustenance but a little wine and water. At last she was gladdened by observing that he had fallen into a deep sleep, from which her hopes augured that a change for the better had taken place. The hot sun of the pestilence had travelled to another hemisphere when he awoke, and the cool breezes of the Gulf were stealing through the lattice-work of the verandah. The hour of madness was passed.

"Ah! Inez," he said, "are you here? I have been dreaming of you, sweet one, and I thought you far away. Kiss me; it will cool these parching lips. Come nearer, John," he continued. "I have but few minutes to live. I leave HER in your charge. See that all I have is secured to her."

"Be easy, Mabry. Whether I live or die, she shall be provided for."

"I shall want nothing," sobbed Inez, leaning her head on the sick man's breast.

There was silence in the death-chamber — a silence whose mute stillness to the senses was yet a volume of mournful eloquence to the soul. It was broken by Mabry Gray. On the

verge of eternity the cherished dream of the patriot soldier found its last utterance:

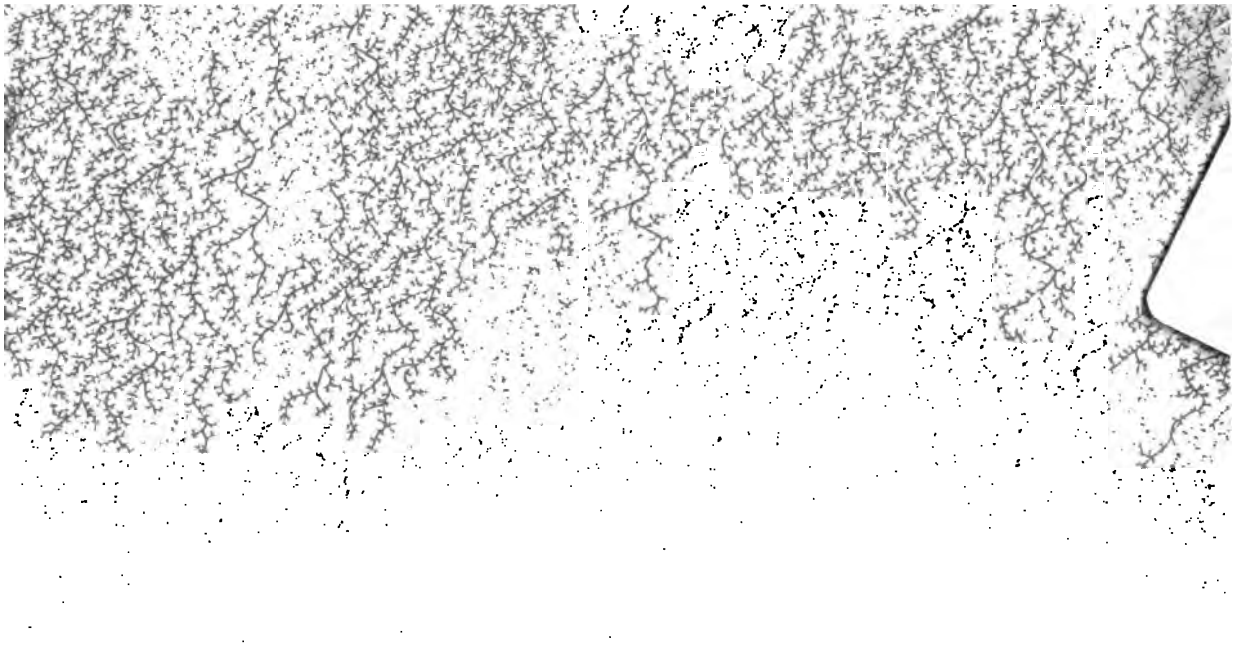
"It is not hard to die, John; and I should be more than content to go, if this close room was a battle-field, and the blood that the fever has dried up in these withered veins had been poured upon a plain of victory, where the shouts of conquering freemen sung the requiem of the brave."

He spoke no more. A low gasp was succeeded by a slight shiver. Inez raised her head from his breast, to look into his face. One glance was sufficient. Nearer and nearer she nestled to the lifeless form. Closer and closer her arms were twined around it. John Allison approached to remove her from the corpse. She heeded him not. He attempted to unclasp her arms. They were cold as the body around which they were locked. Her heart had broken. Their mortal bodies were linked in the embrace of death — their immortal souls had together ascended to the Judgment-Bar, to hear the verdict of eternity.

John Allison discovered around the body of Mabry Gray a broad leathern belt. In one side a miniature likeness of his mother was carefully secured — in the other a small volume of Young's "Night Thoughts," on the title-page of which the name of Julia Allison was written. It was the volume she held in her hand at their last meeting on the Cape Fear. Turning over the pages, an old letter fell from between its leaves. It was dated about a month after the death of Robert Taliafero, and was addressed to William Allison.

"At your request," it read, "I have made additional inquiries in relation to Mr. Taliafero. He was married as I wrote to Mabry Gray, but at the date of that letter his wife had been dead for three months or more. I have reproached myself bitterly for the hasty lines that I fear led to his death, and blasted the prospects of one who is as dear to me as a son. In all other respects, Mr. Taliafero was even worse than I represented him. JOHN BRANTLY."

On the back of this letter, in the well-known hand of Mabry Gray, two words were written. They were, "*Too late.*" What a history of woe did those seven letters reveal! For years he had clung to the belief that the first blood which stained his hands, and the cause of all he had since shed, was a righteous retribution for a fiendish deed. Now the shadows of doubt and uncertainty were cast upon the only consoling reflection that brightened the track of by-gone years. Robert Taliafero *might* have been in search of the proofs of his freedom. He *might* have intended to repair the wrong he had done. If his journey had not been so fatally interrupted, he might have returned and rescued the erring girl from the torturing fears of conscious guilt. What tempests must have shaken the strong man, when these thoughts flashed over him, and all the possible consequences of his headlong passion were manifest! How deep, how intense, must have been his broken-hearted wretchedness, when his trembling hand traced the despairing words "Too Late!"

Mabry Gray and Inez Montero are sleeping in the same grave. In the month of September 1847, a light wagon crossed the Rio Grande. A long wooden box was all its load, and by its side rode scarred and weather-beaten men, who had followed the senseless ashes it contained through many a bloody day. Slowly, silently, and sadly, they wended their way to the silver San Antonio. On the banks of that romantic stream, just where the woods and the Prairie meet, there is a low mound of earth, with a solitary wild rose at its foot, and a spreading Live Oak at the head. Beneath that turf moulder the bones of the bravest soldier, and the loveliest woman, that wrong and sorrow ever maddened into crime.

THE END.